

Islam and Muslims in Austria

Astrid Mattes and Sieglinde Rosenberger

1 Introduction

Austria is characterized as inclusive in terms of the governance of religion and thus often described as a best-practice model for the incorporation of religious minorities, particularly Muslims (Gresch et al. 2008; Kroissenbrunner 2002; Mattes 2012; Schakfeh 2005; Sticker 2008a). This assessment is based on the principle of equal treatment of all legally acknowledged religious communities and the rights and resources they are entitled to. The legal recognition of Islam roots in a law of 1912, which Muslim immigrants who came to Austria following the guest worker recruitment of the 1960s and 1970s referred to when they founded an Islamic Community. Since 1979, the *Islamic Religious Community in Austria* (IGGiÖ, 'Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich') has been serving as the official representative body of Muslims in Austria. Because of the legal status, the IGGiÖ enjoys the same privileges as the recognized Christian churches, including the right to provide state-funded religious instruction in public schools, consultation in the law-making process, the right to collect taxes from its members, and various forms of subsidies.

At the same time, prejudices against Muslims are high, as shown, for example, in analyses based on the European Value Survey (Rosenberger and Seeber 2011). In this vein, since the late 1990s, taking issue with Muslim immigrants in a scare-mongering way and treating Islam as a threat to European and national societies

A. Mattes (✉) · S. Rosenberger
Department of Political Science,
University of Vienna, 1010 Vienna, Austria
e-mail: astrid.mattes@univie.ac.at

S. Rosenberger
e-mail: sieglinde.rosenberger@univie.ac.at

has become one of the core mobilizing themes for the right-wing *Austrian Freedom Party* (Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou 2012). Hence, the legal status of inclusion does not seem to be accompanied by attitudes of the public or reflected in anti-migration party politics.

Against this background, the paper is interested in the question why these extensive religious rights and entitlements have not been restricted despite growing controversies and an intensified debate on Islamic presence in the country. We will discuss both the evolvments of rights and the gap between legal recognition of Islam on the one hand and public resentments, successful right-wing parties which take issue with Islam and Muslims on the other. The paper is based on the assumption that a combination of contextual factors is accountable for the situation that religious rights have not been restricted but in fact further implemented. These factors are: a) the legal acknowledgement of Islam b) the overall neo-corporatist character of Austrian politics, c) the emerging alliances of religious communities, among them the influential Roman Catholic Church, and d) a liberal consensus of mainstream political parties against pressure from the right wing parties on religion policies. We proceed as follows: First, we provide basic information on Islam and Muslims, describing demographics and migration inflows. Second, the institutional setting, i.e. religion-state relations will be addressed. Third, the IGGiÖ as the main representative body of Muslims and its historical roots, which essentially influence today's incorporation of Muslims will be described. Fourth, we picture the Islamic associational landscape and some of IGGiÖ's internal challenges. We then elaborate on conflicts and challenges, showing that contentious issues are either imported from other countries or subject to politicization by right-wing parties within electoral politics. Finally, we will identify new challenges and provide a theoretical reflection on the privileged status of Islam.

2 Austria's Muslim Population at a Glance

In the 1950s Austria was a predominantly Roman Catholic country with only small religious minority communities. At the 1951 census, 89 % of the population considered themselves Roman Catholic, followed by the next largest groups of 6.2 % Protestants and 3.8 % non-denominational. By 2001 the share of Roman Catholics had dropped to 76.6 %, followed by 12 % without a denomination, and 4.7 % Protestants (STATISTIK AUSTRIA 2007).

The Islamic religion was first surveyed as a category at the 1971 census, when 0.3 % of the population declared themselves Muslim. The 2001 census showed an

increase to 4.2 %, when around 350,000 persons stated Islam as their religious belief. The religious denomination has been surveyed in census only until 2001. Numbers for 2009, the latest official calculations available, indicate a further growth in the Muslim community to 6.2 % of the total population (Janda and Vogl 2010).

The early 1960s marked the beginning of Muslim immigration as organized work migration began due to the rapid economic recovery. Until the 1970s Austria recruited workers from the Balkans and Turkey. At that time, guest workers were not expected to remain permanently, as officials had planned to invite workers on a rotation principle. By the time it became clear that the return of many labour migrants was unlikely because they had decided to stay and bring their families, the Muslim community had grown substantially. In 1971 nearly 23,000 Muslims lived in the country. The second major inflow of immigrants, among them considerable numbers of Muslims, was experienced in the early 1990s as a result of the war in Yugoslavia, when a total of 90,000 refugees fled to Austria (Bauböck 1996, p. 21). Finally, one of the most recent developments is Muslim immigration from the Russian Federation, most of them asylum seekers from Chechnya. While the 2001 census registered 87 Muslims from this area, estimates for 2009 assume that over 18,000 Muslims from the Russian Federation live in the territory (Janda and Vogl 2010).

The vast majority of Muslims residing in Austria are Sunni, while Shiites, Alevis, Ahmadi and other Islamic traditions make up very small percentages. More precisely, it is estimated that the Muslim population consists of around 85 % Sunnis and around 12 % Shiites, most of them belonging to the Twelver Shia (Schmied 2005; Sticker 2008b). The in 2013 officially recognized ALEVI has 17,351 registered members according to figures from the relevant Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, but claims 80,000 members by its own count (Die Presse 23.05.2013). In addition there are other Alevi communities, some consider themselves Islamic, others don't. Various Sufi traditions are present, though no figures are available. In 2012 the Ahmadiyya had 78 members according to its own figures. (Heine et al. 2012, p. 94).

Austrian Muslims' main countries of origin are former Yugoslavia and Turkey. Regarding legal citizenship, it is estimated that by 2009 almost half of the Muslim population were Austrian citizens. Of the Muslim population, 21.2 % hold Turkish citizenship, another 19.5 % are estimated to hold a passport from one of the former Yugoslavian countries (Janda and Vogl 2010). As Austria does not grant voting rights to non-citizens, these figures imply that almost half of the Muslim population cannot express political voice at the ballots. Election research indicates that although Muslims tend to share conservative societal views, naturalized Muslims tend to vote

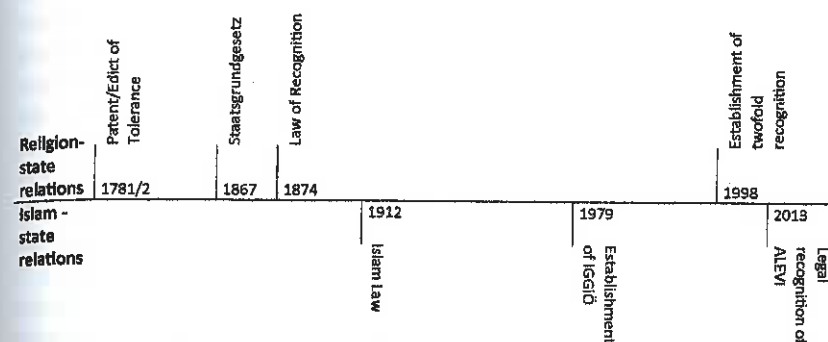
for left-wing parties, in particular for the *Social Democratic Party of Austria* (SPÖ), rather than for right-wing parties (ISA/SORA 2010; Schlaffer 2009, p. 8).

3 Religion-State Relations

Religion and state are separated institutions, implying that state officials do not interfere with religious matters and religious actors refrain from interference with the state. However, separation is not complete, as a number of religious communities are officially recognized by the state and granted certain legal and financial privileges, including a considerable amount of state subsidies. Moreover, Austria is classified as a system of shared tasks or cooperation model in terms of religion-state relations. In contrast to separation models (France, Turkey) or state-church models (UK, Denmark), approaches of cooperation are characterized by a number of privileged religious communities which are involved in various fields of public and political interaction (Minkenberg and Willems 2003). With the establishment of a constitution (*Staatsgrundgesetz*) in 1867, the Habsburg Monarchy granted *Freedom of Belief and Conscience for Everybody*. In fact, the *Staatsgrundgesetz* allowed free observance of faith in private and in public only for those religious communities, which had already been granted a certain status (with the 1781 *Patent of Tolerance* for non-Catholic Christian Churches and the 1782 *Edict of Tolerance*, which included the Jewish community; Berghahn 2001, p. 36). With the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1887, there was particular demand for a specific regulation for the Islamic faith. In 1912 the *Islam Law* accorded Islam of the Hanafite Rite the status of a statutory body. The legal basis for cooperation between most non-Catholic religious organizations and the state is the *Law of Recognition* ('*Anerkennungsgesetz*') dating from 1874. Eventually, this law granted equal treatment to all recognized religious communities and therefore the same level of rights as those enjoyed by the dominant Catholic Church (Kalb et al. 2003, p. 74).

These laws – *Law of Recognition*, *Islam Law* – remain in force today and have formed the basis of the governance of religious pluralism in the Second Republic (after 1945). Johann Bair calls the period after the Second World War a time of tolerance, when a climate dominated by the orientation towards fundamental rights allowed for various further recognitions (Bair 2002, p. 54). Since 1998 the system of recognition of religious groups has been twofold. Religious communities can still be recognized according to the *Law of Recognition* if they fulfil a set of criteria. Communities that do not meet these criteria can be endowed with a legal personality.

called *state-registered confessional communities* ('*Staatlich eingetragene Bekenntnisgemeinschaften*'; Federal Chancellery 2011, p. 10). In 2013, 16 religious groups enjoy this legal status, among them two Islamic organizations. Since 1979 Muslims have been officially represented by the recognized *Islamic Religious Community in Austria*, which has the status of a *privileged corporation of public law* ('*Körperschaft öffentlichen Rechts*'). The *Islamic Alevi Religious Community* (ALEVI; '*Islamisch Alevitische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*') was granted this status in 2013.



Austria's neo-corporatist political style is reflected in the governance of religions (Koenig 2005, p. 224–225). This state corporatist policy grants religious organizations corporate rights.

Corporate organizations, not individuals, are perceived as the central religious actors cooperating with the state (Rosenberger and Mourão Permoser 2009). Religious individuals benefit from these corporate rights, which are equally extensive for Christians and Muslims. The Austrian model could thus be labelled 'pluralistically inclusive' because religious groups with the status of corporations of public law are guaranteed equal treatment and internal autonomy (Gresch et al. 2008).

4 Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich – IGGiÖ

4.1 A "representative" body

Since 1979 the IGGiÖ has been the privileged interlocutor, treated as a unique point of contact between state officials and the Muslim population.

Efforts to organize community life started after the end of the Second World War, when the Muslim community slowly started to grow as refugees, especially from the Balkans, began to arrive in Austria (Strobl 1997). When labour migration from the 1960s onwards led to a significant growth of the Muslim population, religious and cultural services were mainly provided by two associations, the *Muslim Social Service* ('Muslimischer Sozialdienst'), founded in 1962, and a student's association called *Muslim Student Union* ('Muslimische Studentenunion') (Bair 2002). The *Muslim Social Service* was committed to reactivate the *Islam Law* from 1912 to gain legal recognition and the status of a statutory body. However, the first request in 1971 was rejected with reference to the community's insufficient organizational structure and the issue of polygamy. State authorities argued that the possibility of polygamy in Islam could allow followers of a legally acknowledged Islamic community to invoke freedom of religion over national law. It took eight further years to clarify these concerns. To guarantee the conformity of monogamy with Islam, the applicants requested fatwas from Egyptian Al-Azhar University and the Turkish Office for Religious Affairs, which explicitly stated polygamy as an exception in Islam which cannot be performed if national law forbids it (Strobl 1997, p. 4; Heine et al. 2012, p. 56). To counter the criticism of lacking hierarchies, the new representative organization was structured after the model of the Protestant and Jewish communities. The positions of a religious authority ('mufti') and a Community president, in charge of organizational and representational tasks, were created. In 1979 the required by-law for the acknowledgement was finally passed and the IGGiÖ was established.

Today, the IGGiÖ can be considered well established and by far the most important actor regarding political matters on Islam, even if it is sometimes internally and externally contested (Gresch et al. 2008). The IGGiÖ is involved in various public and private institutional activities, among them spiritual welfare in hospitals, prisons and the military, and educational facilities from kindergarten to university. As a recognized religious institution, the IGGiÖ has the right to establish denominational schools and receives state subsidies for various charitable activities. Furthermore, the teachings of all acknowledged religious communities are subject to special legal protection, as their vilification is illegal.

The establishment of education facilities for teachers of Islamic religion in public schools was a relatively early development. The subject, which has been taught in public schools since 1982, became a regular course of study in 1998 (Heine et al. 2012, p. 105). Study programmes for teachers of religious education are designed in the same way as Catholic, Protestant and other study programmes for religious instruction at public schools, organized at special pedagogical universities. At the present, various educational facilities provide training for religious occupations,

among them a private course of study for teachers of religious instruction and a Master Programme in Islamic Religious Pedagogy at the University of Vienna. While the training of teachers is well established, there is a lack in study programmes for Imams. It was only in 2012 when a course of Islamic theology at the University of Vienna was announced and it is supposed to be offered from 2015 onwards. While university training programmes for Imams have already been launched in neighbouring countries—Germany introduced a programme in 2011—this measure has been taken rather late in Austria.

Another adaption to the steadily growing Muslim community is spiritual welfare for the also growing number of Muslim prisoners. Unlike hospitals, prisons are highly restricted in terms of access from outside. Catholic and Protestant (and to a lesser extent Jewish) spiritual welfare has traditionally had a fixed place within prison settings. Ministers are paid by the state, they have access to all prisoners who want to contact them and a chapel or similar places of worship are provided. Islamic spiritual welfare, on the contrary, was for a long time an unsettled concern. Provided only by volunteers and without any legal regulation, the handling of religious needs was up to the prison authorities. In 2010 an agreement between the IGGiÖ and the Ministry of Justice set certain standards for Muslim ministers visiting prisoners and grants some financial compensation to the IGGiÖ (Die Presse 29.01.2012).

4.2 The IGGiÖ and the State: A Political Relationship

In addition to get funding and being invited to consultations in the law-making process, the IGGiÖ is viewed as a representative of Islamic faith by state authorities. From 2000 onwards the IGGiÖ expanded its activities from operating as a passive representative to acting as spokesperson of Muslims more generally. This expanded political role by the IGGiÖ is linked to events surrounding the imposition of "sanctions" against the formation of a right-wing government in Austria by EU member states in the year 2000. At the time, the EU decided to install a commission of three distinguished persons to evaluate the necessity for measures. Their task was to report on the "commitment of the Austrian Government to the common European values, in particular concerning the rights of minorities, refugees and immigrants" (Ahtisaari et al. 2000, p. 1). These experts met with government officials, representatives of political parties, of the judiciary, as well as with civil society and religious organizations in order to gather information for their report. The representatives of the IGGiÖ started a lobbying campaign, contacting repeatedly both the government and the EU representatives to ask for an appointment. Eventually this campaign was successful and the IGGiÖ was able to contribute to the report of

the three experts. Thus, the consultations between the three EU envoys provided an opportunity for the Muslim leadership to carve out a new role for itself in the political arena and to increase its visibility. Since then IGGiÖ representatives have started being invited to round table discussions on television and to consultations with the government on new migration legislation.

Symbolic cooperation between the state and the IGGiÖ has become especially important in the first decade of this century due to the mounting religiously motivated international conflicts. Often this kind of symbolic cooperation between the state and religious organizations takes place in order to prevent or at least minimize the eruption of conflicts related to religion. A particularly poignant example of this was the case of the Mohammed cartoons in Denmark in 2006, an event that spread over many other countries in Europe, creating tensions between several Muslim communities and majority societies. The Austrian government, which held the EU-presidency at that time, undertook two initiatives to mediate the conflict. It organized a religious summit with religious leaders at the chancellor's office, and it held an informal meeting with Danish representatives and Muslim leaders from Bosnia, Syria and Austria. On both occasions the government emphasized that the long-established Austrian model of dialogue and religious toleration could show a way out of the crisis (Mourão Permoser et al. 2010).

4.3 Internal Structure

Internally, the IGGiÖ is organized as a representative body of Muslim associations. The associations send elected delegates to the executive and legislative boards on federal and regional level. The electoral mode, as well as the internal organization of the IGGiÖ is very complex. Individuals register as IGGiÖ members via the association they are members of (see Chap. 5). For each 50 registered members, associations are entitled to one delegate. Therefore the associations play a crucial role in mobilizing their members to vote.

Elections are organised according to the subdivision of nine religious communities, one in every federal state. Delegates are directly elected on a local level for a 4-year period and elect delegates to the federal boards on their part (the legislative 'Shura Council' which then elects the executive 'Superior Council'). To avoid an ethnic prevalence, the IGGiÖ constitution states that no more than half of the members of each board can belong to the same ethnic or linguistic group (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich—IGGiÖ 2009).

While the IGGiÖ is clearly accepted as the single point of contact by state officials, it had been criticized for not being sufficiently representative by certain

Muslim associations. From a legal perspective, the IGGiÖ membership has followed the *ex lege* principle, which is also applied in trade unions and business chambers. Whoever fulfilled the criteria of being Muslim and resided in Austria has been viewed as represented by the IGGiÖ (Kalb et al. 2003). Those Muslim groups who did not feel represented by the IGGiÖ were unable to rely on other institutional structures that would enable them to be heard in decision-making processes.¹

The lack of representativeness has been criticized regarding the participation in elections of IGGiÖ functionaries. One condition that needs to be fulfilled to be entitled to vote is to pay membership fees. According to media reports, at the election in 2001, only 5500 members cast their vote (Wiener Zeitung 08.11.2010). At the most recent elections in 2010/2011, this picture changed significantly, although not sufficiently to silence critics. Of 125,000 registered members and 27,095 members entitled to vote, 76.5 % actually participated in the elections. In a recent study commissioned by the government, 48 % of those questioned felt represented by the IGGiÖ, 44 % did not (Ulram and Tributsch 2013, p. 30).

5 Islamic Associational Life

Religious life as gatherings, prayers, festivals, religious educational courses and social activities mostly take place within a wide range of associations. These associations reflect the diversity of Islam in Austria, which is especially visible at the over 170 Islamic sites (mosques, prayer houses, associations, kindergartens and schools) in the capital of Vienna (Reiss et al. 2013). These sites are as diverse as the community itself. Apart from a variety of autonomous organisations, most of them belong to umbrella associations with a series of branches. These umbrella associations are politically influential within the IGGiÖ as they can send higher numbers of delegates to the boards than autonomous groups.

Associations are formed mainly along ethnic/national lines and/or religious traditions. Despite some denominational and ideological identifiers, the majority of Muslim associations can clearly be traced to a certain ethnic, national or regional background. Within the past ten years, some multi-ethnic/multi-national associations were formed, but they are still exceptions. National languages are

¹ The recognition of the *Islamic Alevi Religious community in Austria* showed that the application for legal recognition can be a successful way for Islamic groups that do not feel represented by the IGGiÖ. An adaption of the legal setting regarding the *ex lege* principle is pending.

often the primary language of internal communication, the intensity of external communications (websites, folders, etc.) varies greatly. While the IGGiÖ endeavours to represent an Austrian Islam without national, ethnic or "denominational" labels, there are no attempts to change the associational structure. The highly fragmented associational landscape developed over time and partly as a legal necessity to create an association in order to be allowed to run meeting or prayer rooms. Below we briefly describe the key associations—in terms of numbers and/or influence—by their national/ethnic background. Relevant information to present the associations is taken from Vienna based research project "Islam-Landkarte" (www.islam-landkarte.at, Aslan 2012).

5.1 "Turkish" Associations

Three associations of Turkish background dominate the organizational landscape: The *Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Collaboration in Austria*, the *Islamic Federation*, and the *Union of Islamic Cultural Centres*. Contrary to most other groups, these Turkish associations are organized rather hierarchically and were able to establish branches across the whole country. Since the elections in 2010/2011 the majority of delegates to the IGGiÖ are sent by Turkish associations.

The *Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Collaboration in Austria* (ATIB,² "Türkisch-Islamische Union für kulturelle und soziale Zusammenarbeit in Österreich") is an official organization of the Turkish governmental office for religious affairs, *Diyanet*. Founded in 1990, in terms of membership the association is today the strongest Muslim association in Austria. Originally the association was supposed to provide religious services to prevent Turkish citizens abroad from joining Islamic associations that did not agree with Turkish state policies on religion. It is highly influenced by Turkey, not least through the fact that the association's presidency is held by the religious attaché of the Turkish embassy (Heine et al. 2012, p. 68). This explains why ATIB for a long time refused to cooperate with other Islamic associations in Austria. This changed under the religious conservative AKP government and has led to various collaborations, including involvement in the IGGiÖ. ATIB has 65 branches, mostly concentrated in Vienna and the western federal states, especially Vorarlberg. In addition to religious services, ATIB organizes folklore events and other activities around Turkish traditions. At the 2011 IGGiÖ election this Turkish association was the most successful group.

² Turkish: *Avusturya Türk İslam Kültür ve Sosyal Yardımlaşma Birliği*.

One of the largest and also most influential Muslim groups is the *Islamic Federation* (IF, 'Islamische Föderation'). The IF is the Austrian section of the Turkish religio-political movement *Millî Görüş* ('National Vision'), seen as a relevant Turkish diaspora organization in Europe (Akpınar 2007, p. 134). The Austrian branch was founded in 1987 and is strongly oriented towards Muslims of Turkish origin and their descendents (Heine et al. 2012, p. 73). The umbrella association unites mosques, prayer houses and clubs in Vienna, Lower Austria, Upper Austria and Salzburg. According to IF, the association runs 36 clubs and 72 related installations. The in 2011 elected IGGiÖ president Fuat Sanac is associated with this group.

The *Union of Islamic Cultural Centres* (UICC, 'Union Islamischer Kulturzentren'/'Vereinigung Islamischer Kulturzentren'³) is characterized by its Sufi origin and provides religious services in 43 branches all over Austria. The association claims to be orientated towards the Sufi traditions of the Turkish *Süleymani* order and the *Naqschibandiyya* tradition from Central Asia. Ednan Aslan argues that, although the UICC is viewed as non-political in Austria, the association is involved in Turkish politics through close connections with Turkish political elites.

5.2 Associations for Muslims from the Balkans

Muslims from former Yugoslavia and the Balkans are organized rather loosely within various autonomous associations and two umbrella organizations, the *Union of Bosniak Islamic Associations in Austria* (UBIAA, 'Verband der bosniakischen islamischen Vereine in Österreich') and *Union of Albanian Muslims in Austria* (UAMA, 'Dachverband der albanischen Muslime in Österreich'). Contrary to the aforementioned Turkish groups, these associations play a minor role within the IGGiÖ.

Forty mosque communities are united in the UBIAA. A Bosnian umbrella association was originally founded in 1994 but split up and was reunited and renamed in 2012. The association is not only a member of the IGGiÖ, but also of the *Bosnian Islamic Community* ('Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini'), which is the central Muslim organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Smajić 2012, p. 100). Bosnian religious leaders can therefore influence the mosque communities' activities in Austria, as important decisions, like the hiring of an imam, require official permission.

The UAMA unites twelve local mosque communities. Albanian here does not refer to a nationality but to a shared language. Most members originate from Kosovo or Macedonia but speak Albanian. Beside the provision of religious services for the

³ VIKZ; this name is used in the western part of Austria.

Albanian Muslim community in Austria, the association names the upholding of Albanian tradition and national matters as one of their primary goals.

5.3 Arab Associations

The number of Muslims originating from Arab-speaking countries is in fact quite small. The largest group among them has an Egyptian background (in total 5269 Egyptian citizens currently live in Austria; STATISTIK AUSTRIA 2013). There is no umbrella association of Arab Muslims but a series of single, mostly nationally bound organizations. Despite their small number, the Arab Muslims (if they are considered as a group) ranked second in the IGGiÖ elections, while the much more numerous Balkan community ranked only third among those elected into office. Arab Islam is also influential because money inflows from Saudi-Arabia and other gulf states have allowed the realization of infrastructure projects, among them building the first mosque in Vienna (Die Presse 20.11.2009). Another project initiated by Saudi-Arabian sponsors in 2012 was the establishment of the Vienna-based *King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue*, which has been founded in collaboration with Austria, Spain and the Holy See (KAICIID 2012).

5.4 Shiite Associations

Shiites make up only around 12 % of Austrian Muslim population. Main countries of origin are Iran and Afghanistan, with some smaller groups originating from Turkey, Iraq and other Arab countries (Heine et al. 2012, p. 77). The majority of Shiite organizations are represented by the *Islamic Association Ahl-ul-Bayt* ('Islamische Vereinigung Ahl-ul-Bayt'). Six associations, five of them located in Vienna, form this group with an estimated 5,000 members.

5.5 Multi-National Associations

Two multi-national associations are of particular political and societal relevance: the *Initiative of Muslim Austrians* (IMA) and the *Muslim Youth of Austria* (MYA).

The IMA is hardly relevant in terms of numbers but taken into account due to its rather outstanding position as a multi-ethnic association that explicitly declared

the promotion of an Austrian Islamic identity as its goal (Sticker 2008b, p. 12). The leadership consists of six to ten people of different backgrounds, among them prominent members, such as the social-democratic politician Omar al-Rawi and the former press spokeswomen of the IGGiÖ, Carla Amina Baghajati. This might help to understand the high level of media coverage of this small organization, which aims to promote social cohesion and fight discrimination and racism.

Nowadays the MYA is an autonomous youth organization, which had been founded in 1994 by a group of young Muslim second generation immigrants. For some years, the MYA claimed the status of the official IGGiÖ youth organization. This changed with the creation of an IGGiÖ youth council in 2012 (Mattes 2012). The multi-national group aims to promote an Austrian Islamic lifestyle among Muslim adolescents. The language of internal and external communication is German and the activities are gender-mixed, which—even for a youth group—is rather exceptional. The MYA and its representatives enjoy a lot of media coverage, not least because of the groups' extensive charity activities.

Umbrella Associations (religious/ethnic/language)		Size/branches	Relation to IGGiÖ ^a	Religious/Cultural life
Turkish	Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Collaboration in Austria (ATIB)	65 branches	strongest group; represented in Shura and Superior Council; i. a. IGGiÖ Vice President	religious services; pilgrimages, religious education and funeral services; folklore activities, youth work, Turkish and German language classes
	Islamic Federation (IF)	36 clubs and 72 related installations	represented in Shura and Superior Council; i. a. IGGiÖ President	religious services; social and educational services (child care, youth groups, student groups)
	Union of Islamic Cultural Centres (UICC)	43 branches	represented in Shura and Superior Council; i. a. IGGiÖ General Secretary	close to Sufi traditions; religious services pilgrimages; educational programs, boarding schools, child care facilities
Balkans	Union of Bosniak Islamic Associations in Austria (UBIAA)	40 mosque communities	represented in Shura and Superior Council	religious services; concerts, commemorations, folklore festivals
	Union of Albanian Muslims in Austria (UAMA) (based on common language)	12 mosque communities	represented in Shura and Superior Council	religious services; pilgrimages; conferences and exchange programs with Macedonian Muslim communities
Shiite	Islamic Association Ahl-ul-Bayt (multi-national)	6 mosque communities	represented in Shura Council and religious advisory board;	religious services; festivals and lectures on religious issues
Multi-national	Initiative of Muslim Austrians (IMA)	single association	represented in Shura and Superior Council; Rapporteur for Women;	no religious services; cultural events; high media presence
	Muslim Youth of Austria (MYA)	no figures available	represented in Shura and Superior Council; Rapporteur for Integration;	religious festivals; educational training; charitable activities; mixed gender activities

^a Following the 2011 IGGiÖ internal elections

To sum up, Muslim associations play an important role in shaping religious life, providing religious services and cultural activities. Hence, the IGGiÖ is not only a representation of Austrian Muslims but also provides a common structure for exchange and collaboration among the diverse associations. Muslim associations also have a role as partners within the political system. They fulfil a bridging function

between religion and politics as they have close ties with political parties and state authorities (Kroissenbrunner 2003; Sohler 2004).

6 Contesting Religious Rights of Muslims

With regard to conflicts about Islam in Austria, it is important to note that legal conflicts and political contestation at governmental level are rare. However, anti-immigrant sentiments are widespread among the population and anti-Islamic attitudes have been additionally raised by the FPÖ, which has been running on slogans such as "Home not Islam – Daham statt Islam" with considerable electoral success. Hence, politicization of Islam is—although similar to other European countries with strong populist parties—very high (Rosenberger and Hady-Abdou 2012). Studies based on the European Value Study indicate that a rather high proportion of Austrian respondents express resentment against living next to Muslims, migrants and people of a different skin colour (Rosenberger and Seeber 2011, p. 182). Muslims—especially females who wear the headscarf—experience discrimination in everyday life and in the workplace (Forstenlechner and Al-Waqfi 2010, p. 773; ZARA Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus Arbeit 2013). In the following section we discuss some contentious issues.

6.1 Wearing the Headscarf

To ban any form of Muslim veiling in public has never been seriously debated at governmental level. While Austrian right-wing parties, especially the FPÖ, repeatedly called for forbidding the wearing of headscarves in public, the two major political parties, the Christian-Conservative *Austrian People's Party* and the *Social-Democratic Party of Austria* insisted that this issue is not a matter of negotiation due to the legal tradition of the state-religion relationship. Mainstream political actors as well as religious representatives, for instance former IGGiÖ president Anas Schakfeh, emphasize and praise the model of inclusive governance of religious diversity in this context (Schakfeh 2005).

In some cases the right to wear a headscarf in the workplace was questioned. Disputed cases are known for the public health system and the Viennese public transport association. The *Viennese Association of Hospitals* ('Verbund der Wiener Krankenanstalten') issued an internal binding decree in 2006 advocating a non-prohibition policy (Gresch et al. 2008). The IGGiÖ has issued various statements

on the headscarf issue, clearly stating that the right to wear a headscarf in public is seen as non-negotiable for the Muslim community.

By large, the issue of veiling seems to be non-negotiable on both sides: neither the IGGiÖ nor mainstream political parties are willing to allow any legal restrictions on wearing the headscarf.

6.2 Circumcision

In June 2012 the decision of a court in Cologne on circumcision initiated a debate, which also spread to Austria. The court had decided that male circumcision of children harms their right to physical integrity. This non-binding court decision opened an intensive debate on the legal situation in Germany. In Austria, this debate was opened as well and especially encouraged by atheist organizations, with political actors joining in later. While individuals of the FPÖ and their separate wing, the *Carinthian Freedom Party* called for a ban on circumcision, the governmental actors sought de-escalation (Der Standard 25.07.2012). In due course, a religious coalition formed. The religious communities concerned—Austrian Jews and Muslims—were supported by leading clergy from the Catholic and Protestant churches.

During the most intense phase of the debate, a law on cosmetic surgery was passed in parliament. The supplement to the bill stated that male circumcision is not classified as cosmetic surgery, but as a bodily harm according to criminal code. However, as a religious rite of recognized religious communities it does not offend common decency and is therefore not illicit (Österreichische Bundesregierung 2012, p. 11). Although this supplement does not have a legally binding status, it can be argued that the government sent a signal in favour of this religious rite. The Federal Ministry of Justice moreover referred to this law when giving legal opinion on the issue, which had been demanded by the governor of Vorarlberg.

6.3 Building Mosques and Prayer Places

First attempts to build a mosque in Vienna go back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when Emperor Franz Joseph I supported construction plans for a Viennese mosque and provided financial resources for it. The outbreak of the First World War prevented the realization of this project and it took a further 70 years until the first mosque was built in Vienna (Klieber 2010). In the past years Austria has experienced some conflicts over the construction of Islamic buildings.

The construction of a mosque in Bad Vöslau is often cited as a best-practice model—although ATIB, the Islamic association involved had to accept a series of conditions⁴, later presented as compromises. Within a 2-year mediation process the parties to this project agreed on extensive changes in the architect's plan, especially concerning the size of the planned minarets. Still, this case can be seen as a successfully mediated process, as there was a broad frame for discussion which allowed keeping the debate at the local level and most of the conflict had calmed down by the time of the opening in 2009 (Fürlinger 2010; Heine et al. 2012).

The conflict around the extension of an Islamic cultural centre in the 20th Viennese district, again initiated by the Turkish association ATIB, developed in a completely different manner. Here, a citizen's initiative formed to prevent the building, citing fears of noise pollution and a shortage of parking space—arguments, which are well known from similar conflicts in other European states (Maussen 2009). This local conflict became more intense when conservative and right-wing politicians started to support the citizens' initiative and other, anti-Islamic, groups joined the protest (Kübel et al. 2008). The dispute caught nationwide attention when the chairman of the *Austrian Freedom Party* (FPÖ) took part in a protest march in May 2009, holding up a crucifix during his speech. This was harshly criticized by Christian church representatives. When construction work began in spring 2013 the parties to the conflict had not come to an understanding.

In 2008, the federal state parliaments of Carinthia and Vorarlberg passed amendments of the building regulations which de-facto impede the construction of mosques. These regulations do not refer to Islamic sites in particular but oblige the approval of a special committee for "unusual" buildings. However, the intention to prohibit especially mosques and minarets was openly expressed by politicians in charge. Ernst Fürlinger calls this a "local practice of non-recognition" (Fürlinger 2010, p. 184).

7 New Challenges

The following section deals with new challenges for Austrian Muslims, taking into account the IGGiÖ as well as the broader picture of Muslim life.

⁴ In a contract, the city council and ATIB not only agreed on distinctive architectural changes and a ban on calls to prayer, but also stipulated that the city council has the right to nominate three persons with voting rights in the elections of the association's board (Fürlinger 2010, p. 205).

7.1 Democracy and Islamism

In 2009 the doctoral thesis of Mouhanad Khorchide, a sociologist, teacher and Imam, who had been engaged in various IGGiÖ activities, especially in the field of education, attracted huge attention. Some results of this survey of attitudes of teachers of Islamic religious education clearly stated that significant proportions of teachers displayed attitudes which must be considered problematic. 21.9 % of the interviewees indicated an incompatibility of democracy with Islam. 27.1 % of the interviewed teachers rejected the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* because of incompatibility with Islam, 18.2 % of them accept the death penalty as a punishment for apostasy (Khorchide 2009, p. 93 ff.). As a consequence, the Federal Minister of Education, Arts and Culture, and the former IGGiÖ president negotiated a package of measures, including new contracts for all teachers of Islamic religious education, a revision of the curriculum and teaching materials, and new inspection arrangements (Schmied 2009).

Concerning religious extremism among Muslims, only few individual cases are known. Mohamed M. and his wife Mona S. were convicted of participation in the activities of a terrorist group in 2008. They had distributed extremist videos via an al-Qa'ida-linked internet platform (Heine et al. 2012, p. 99). While the woman distanced herself from radical views after her imprisonment, Mohamed M. published threats against Austria and was again imprisoned in Turkey, where he tried to pass the boarder to Syria (Kocina and Ultsch 2012). Mohamed M. was given a nickname by the media, where he is frequently referred to as "the Austro-Islamist".

The *Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution* reports a number of detentions mainly in the context of suspicious travel activities. Although radical attitudes among some Muslim groups were observed, no violent behaviour or plans for terrorist attacks were discovered. The observed activities of radical groups were mostly limited to recruitment and mobilization. The report also states clearly that radicalization concerns mainly young men (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Terrorismusbekämpfung 2013).

7.2 Searching for a New Political Role

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the IGGiÖ seems to be expected to prove its distance and disapproval to any violent behaviour by Muslims around the globe. Be it New York, Spain, India, Egypt, Bali or the Netherlands—wherever violence had been committed in the name of Islam, the IGGiÖ distanced itself and the Austrian

Muslim community from these activities. However, the new leadership after the 2011 internal elections, has been searching for a modified political understanding. This is particularly visible in three areas: first, the ending of outwardly oriented dissociation of foreign conflicts; second, a strong focus on securing and promoting the rights of Muslims in Austria; and third, coalition building processes with other religious actors.

The IGGiÖ-president Fuat Sanac elected in 2011 stated at the beginning of his term that the organization will no longer comment on everyday politics, especially foreign political issues (religion.orf.at 20.06.2011). Political issues within Austria, however, were and still are commented on. One example is the condemnation of deportations of refugees. Pakistani members of a refugee protest movement that formed in November 2012 and demanded better conditions for asylum seekers and a liberalization of the asylum procedure were deported during Ramadan 2013. Sanac harshly criticized the authorities' course of action in terms of the timing of deportation, the harshness of the procedure and the unwillingness to grant the right of residence on humanitarian grounds (Sanac 2013). With this statement he joined the Catholic Cardinal, Christoph Schönborn, who also condemned the deportations.

Close cooperation of religious representatives, as in this case, can frequently be observed in Austria. When male circumcision was discussed, Catholic and Protestant representatives clearly stated the importance of this ritual for Jews and Muslims and condemned any attempts to ban it. The IGGiÖ could also rely on the support of Christian churches whenever the public visibility of Islam was discussed and anti-Islamic arguments were used in politics.

When in 2013 a popular initiative was launched against the privileged position of religious communities with the aim of changing legal regulations on religion and abolishing any privileges, this coalition of religions put up a joint public appearance: The 'Pro Religion' platform (www.proreligion.at) was founded in May 2012 by the legally recognized religious communities and is mainly focused on warding off criticism and promoting the positive work of religious communities.

7.3 The Next Generation(s)

"Young, dynamic, educated"⁵; "being Muslim and Austrian—there is no contradiction"⁶; "Austrian-Islamic identity means civic, political, economic and cultural

⁵ Taşdöğen 2012.

⁶ Muslimische Jugend Österreich 2013.

participation"⁷; these are only some of the self-confident keywords Muslim youth groups are using to present themselves in public. While studies show that religious identification among the second and third generations of Muslims in Austria is declining⁸, there is also a trend towards a very conscious commitment to an Islamic lifestyle. Groups like the multi-ethnic *Muslim Youth of Austria* and the official IGGiÖ youth board ('Jugendrat der Islamischen Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich') are extensively promoting a new image of Islam in Austria, focusing on the compatibility of national and religious elements.

Civic engagement of young Muslims is fostered through charity programmes, educational measures are provided on personal skills as well as on religious teachings, together with help on their implementation in the everyday life of young Muslims in Austria and these groups also seem to be in favour of media attention. The lines between internal and external communication are often blurred through the extensive use of social media. At the same time, this suggests a high degree of openness towards the majority society. Developments within the Austrian Muslim population are especially visible in the youth organizations. While there is a declining religiosity among young Muslims, many of those who decide to live a religious lifestyle seem to do so very consciously (Ullram and Tributsch 2013).

8 Conclusion

Islam in Austria is due to its long established legal status which grants equal rights to all legally acknowledged religions in a rather exceptional position compared to other European Muslim communities. Despite a highly politicized debate, strong resentments among the majority population and strong right-wing parties, this legal status was not affected.

To conclude, we want to reflect on four points, which might explain the continuity of inclusive policies on religion and Islam in particular: the long-established legal acknowledgement of Islam; the corporatist character of politics; the alliance of religious communities; and a liberal consensus of mainstream political actors against pressure from the right wing populist parties on religion policies.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ First generation: 73 % of male and 87 % of female Muslims consider themselves religious; second generation: 57 % of male and 62 % of female Muslim consider themselves religious; Overall, 38 % of the Austrian population consider themselves religious (religion.orf.at, 23.04.2013; Ullram and Tributsch 2013).

First, the legal recognition of Islam sets the standards for the incorporation of Muslims in Austrian society and politics. Many issues, that are disputed in most European countries, are legally regulated and controversy is limited to either details of implementation or external criticism with little policy impact. The situation that the IGGiÖ was established in 1979, long before Islam became a politicized issue, can partly explain this comprehensive accommodation. Still, the early recognition does not account for the fact that religious rights of Muslims were not restricted or withdrawn when right wing parties adopted Islam as one of their core mobilizing themes. Even during the FPÖ government participation religious rights were not contested. Three further contextual factors might help to understand.

Second, it is important to note that Islam also benefits from a religion-friendly atmosphere and a tradition of inclusive church-state relations. Rather than viewing Austria as a stronghold of religious tolerance towards Islam, the inclusive policies on religions have to be seen in the light of the past and the political culture, as, for example, the corporatist tradition is reflected in church-state relations. Although the Roman Catholic Church is of special importance in the public sphere and Christian churches still enjoy greater privileges than non-Christian communities in terms of public presence (e.g., crucifixes in class rooms), the concept of "pluralist inclusion" basically grants the same extensive rights to all religious communities that have achieved legal recognition.

Third, the existence of an alliance of religious communities, among them the influential Roman Catholic Church definitely helps to avoid any political attempt to restrict the rights and privileges of the IGGiÖ. In this chapter we mentioned various examples where religious communities acted as a block against any form of debate on the restriction of religious rights or supported Muslim interests.

Fourth, a liberal consensus of mainstream political actors against pressure from the right wing populist parties on religion policies can be observed. Whenever the *Austrian Freedom Party* or other right-wing actors claimed to restrict religious rights, mainstream political actors did not support this. However, this observation only concerns the policy field of religion. The perception of Islam as a religion more strongly linked to migration than others blurred the lines between Islam as a religious community and Islam as subject of migration/integration policy. When it comes to migration issues no such consensus against right-wing politicization can be identified.

Together these contextual factors seem to have more influence on the level of political decision making than Austria's relatively strong right-wing party and the negative public attitudes towards Islam.

At the same time, these factors do not prevent discrimination, harassment and conflict. While privileges, such as religious instruction in public schools, Islamic

cemeteries and Muslim spiritual welfare in public institutions, ease Muslim life, the main challenge for the inclusion of Islam lies in the lack of tolerance among the population. However, the legal incorporation of Islam guarantees religious freedom and institutional inclusion to an extent most other European Muslim communities could only wish for. Therefore the Austrian model of incorporation can be seen as exemplary even if we must not forget that many issues over Islamic presence in Europe do not primarily relate to religion but to issues of migration and tolerance and can therefore not be managed through religion policies. To close this gap between the legal and institutional inclusion of Islam and the social, economic and political marginalization of Muslims with an immigration background constitutes a major challenge in the Austrian context.

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Islam in Belgium: From Formal Recognition to Public Contestation

Corinne Torrekens

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a general overview of the current situation concerning the accommodation of Islam in Belgium.¹ As Belgium's national statistics do not include any information on the religious affiliations of the population, it remains extremely difficult to arrive at an accurate figure for the number of Muslims living in Belgium today. Consequently, the best we can do is to use orders of magnitude and estimates based on an extrapolation of the number of people who have migrated to Belgium and their descendants. These estimates have at least two major disadvantages. First, they assume that all immigrants from countries where Islam is the dominant religion are Muslims, as are their descendants, whereas in fact some of them may belong to other religions (certain Muslim countries have or had large Jewish and/or Christian minorities, for example) or be nonreligious. Secondly, the

¹ This paper is based on different types of data gathered over the past ten years. Two periods of fieldwork were carried out, the first between 2004 and 2007 in the context of my PhD dissertation, and the second in 2011 in the framework of the Eurislam project led for Belgium by Prof. Dirk Jacobs (<http://www.eurislam.eu/page=site.home>). During these two periods of fieldwork more than seventy interviews were conducted with several Muslim representatives of different ethnic background, NGOs and political representatives. The second period of fieldwork provided me with an opportunity to interview both the same and different individuals than in 2004–2007 and to verify and further the conclusions of my PhD dissertation. Secondary data such as press releases, web resources, informal exchanges with Muslim representatives and parliamentary debates are also used in order to frame the general context of the paper.

C. Torrekens (✉)

Institut de Sociologie, Université libre de Bruxelles, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
e-mail: corinne.torrekens@ulb.ac.be