

“Islamic Charter” of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD) – A Comment

Translated by Dr. Kerstin Molthagen.

On February 3, 2002, the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (German: Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland – ZMD) passed an “Islamic Charter” ¹, which is supposed to be a Muslim “manifesto regarding the German state and society”. Those who take a closer look at the “charter” will notice that it completely omits some crucial topics, such as the position of women or the persecution of Christians in the Islamic world. Other topics are discussed with so little clarity and unambiguousness that several interpretations are possible. This complicates the approach to the document.

The “Islamic Charter” addresses both Muslims in Germany and the state and society. It presents rights and duties for both sides, from its own point of view. Thus, the “Charter” obtains the character of a contract. Contracts between Muslims and non-Muslims have a long tradition ² and great importance in Islamic history. The word “contract” is omitted in the “Charter”, but one can assume that the ZMD views the “Charter” as the offering of a contract that obtains a binding character once state and society accept it.

Simultaneously, the ZMD, by now representative of only a small number of Muslims, would be accepted as the official contact for state and society.

Comment on the “Islamic Charter”

(Quotes from the “Islamic Charter” are displayed as quotations in quotation marks, whereas the comments are printed in regular font.)

“Manifesto of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD) regarding the relations of Muslims to state and society”

The “Central Council of Muslims in Germany” (ZMD) emerged from the “Islamic Working Group Germany” (Islamischer Arbeitskreis Deutschland) in 1994. Today, the ZMD represents only 10,000 members, a small minority of the about 3,3 million Muslims in Germany ³ (the other two Muslim parent organisations, the “Islam Council” (Islamrat) and “Turkish-Islamic Union” (Türkisch- Islamische Union), count 185,000 and about 125,000 members, respectively). The term “Central Council”, reminding people of the “Central Council of the Jews” (Zentralrat der Juden), is therefore easily misleading. Muslim voices have already harshly criticized the “Charter” for having been published unilaterally, without achieving an overall Muslim consensus in advance. ⁴

Thus, the ZMD is a minority organisation, a fact never articulated in the “Charter” by the ZMD. Formulations like “relations of Muslims to state and society” are therefore ill-chosen; only the

“relations” of the small number of Muslims who feel themselves still represented by the ZMD “to state and society” can be defined. It is as regrettable that the “Charter” mentions only state and society, but nowhere illustrates the relations to the Christian churches. Two out of three Germans are still members of a church, after all.

“Islam is no new phenomenon in Germany, and above all, it is no passing phenomenon. More than 3.2 million Muslims live in Germany; many of them third or fourth generation. Most Muslims identify themselves with the German society and will stay in Germany forever.”

The meaning of the “identification with the German society” remains vague. Practising Muslims usually do not consider the German social order, secularly formed and with a pluralistic value system, to be desirable; they regard it as godless and immoral. With those parts of the German social order still formed in a Christian manner, Muslims will hardly be able to “identify” because Christianity, viewed by the Islam, is a false religion. Muslims campaigning for the application of Islamic law – including criminal and marriage law – cannot, at the same time, identify with gender equality and democratic principles, the application of western criminal and marriage law, and the separation of religion and state.

“Germany has become home not only to those 500,000 Muslims owning a German passport. All Muslims feel like German citizens, not like guests in a ‘guest country’.”

“All Muslims” is again problematic because the ZMD, as stated above, speaks only for a small minority. The statement that “all Muslims” are “citizens” attributes the right to a say to those who are indeed only guests (i.e., asylum seekers, people with limited residence permit status, refugees with pending repatriation etc.). But to whom will they prove loyal in case of conflicts – to the German state (because of their German passport), or to their country of origin and the Muslim community (the umma)?

“As a large minority in this country, Muslims are obligated to become integrated into society, to open up and start a dialogue with society about their profession and practice of faith. The rest of society has a right to know how Muslims think about the fundamentals of the constitutional state, to its fundamental law, to democracy, pluralism, and human rights.”

One has to look favourably on this appeal to dialogue and disclosure of Muslim beliefs! Do the “Charter”, or the ZMD, contribute to this end? Do mosque congregations, in particular, open up to the German society, does the desire for integration and disclosure exist? Is not separation and withdrawal from the German society taught at mosques instead?

“Even though Muslims have addressed these topics several times, they still owe the majority a comprehensive, clearly worded, and authoritative answer. This deficiency became obvious - not least through the debate following September 11, 2001.”

Again: This statement has to be commended! Unfortunately, the “Charter” does not meet the “deficiency” of a “comprehensive, clearly worded, and authoritative answer”: it is neither “comprehensive” (because it leaves out many topics) nor “clearly worded” (because it leaves

many topics undecided), nor “authoritative” (due to the small number of ZMD members). In particular, the “Charter” offers no answers to questions raised by the events of September 11, 2001.

“By this charter, which was passed unanimously by its representative assembly on February 3, 2002, the ZMD wishes to articulate its clear position regarding these basic thoughts, and contribute to a de-emotionalisation of the socio-politic debate.”

“Clear positions” can be found in the “Charter”, above all, in the demands on the German society and state (see below): call to prayer via loudspeaker, halal ⁵ butchering, building mosques, and others. Unambiguous declarations regarding topics as violence against non-Muslims, persecution of Christians, validity of the Sharia, role of women, etc., would be required for a “de-emotionalisation” of the debate.

Dr. Nadeem Elyas, Berlin, February 20, 2002, Chairman “ISLAMIC CHARTER - MANIFESTO OF THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF MUSLIMS IN GERMANY (ZMD) REGARDING THE RELATIONS OF MUSLIMS TO STATE AND SOCIETY”

A charter is, by common consent, a fundamental document of constitutional and international law, which is normally passed by states and governments. This standard is not met by the document in question. Since the text frequently uses the term “diaspora”, one has to ask, too, whether the declarations of this “Charter” are meant to be enduring principles or whether they apply only as long as Muslims are a minority. Will the declarations be still valid in case the Islam can, due to shifting majorities, exert more political influence in Germany?

“1. Islam is the religion of peace”

The statement “the religion of peace” gives the impression that the Islam is the one and only true religion that makes peace. This is a statement of ideology, not a historical fact, and it devalues other religions, including Christianity.

“‘Islam’ means, at the same time, peace and devotedness.”

From a semantic point of view, “Islam” does not mean peace. It means “surrender, devotion, submission” to God and his will as it is handed down in the Qur’an and tradition. The Arabic word for “peace”, on the other hand, is “salam”. These two words are not interchangeable. Even though Muslims think that a general acceptance of Islam, and the establishment of Islamic law would mean that all humans could live in peace, the word “Islam” cannot be translated as “peace”.

“The Islam views itself as a religion through which people can find peace with themselves and the world by voluntary devotion to God. In a historical sense, Islam is, besides Judaism and Christianity, one of three monotheistic world religions which came into being in the Middle East. As a continuation of the line of God’s revelations, it has much in common with the other two.”

Calling Judaism and Christianity “monotheistic religions” is a conviction which is surely not shared by all Muslims, since the Qur’an views the Christian belief in the trinity as polytheism (worship of several Gods). Islam is the “continuation of the line of God’s revelations” only from an

Islamic point of view, not from a Christian point of view. Since the Qur'an on one side and Old (OT) and New Testament (NT) on the other side differ, and exclude each other, in very central statements (role of Muhammad/ Jesus Christ, question of salvation, question of true revelations), they have much less "in common" in these questions than what separates them theologically. With this paragraph, the "Charter" characterises Islam as a "continuation" of the (from Islamic view) forged Judaism and Christianity, which are completed by Islam, the "true revelation".

"2. We believe in the merciful God"

The mercy attributed to God by Qur'an and Islamic theology is always an unpredictable mercy which Allah, based on his omnipotence, gives to whom he will. He shows pity or is angry with someone just according to his will because he is a "cunning" God (sura 13, 13). However, in both OT and NT, and in Jewish-Christian theology, God has committed himself to the obligation of an alliance with man. In his covenants, with Moses and through Jesus in particular, God swears to show mercy to humans, and to assuredly forgive them.

"Muslims believe in God whom they - like Arabian Christians - call 'Allah'."

Even though Arabian Christians do use the word "Allah", a unity in content is proclaimed here which both sides reject because it does not exist in theology. The view of God presented by Islam/ Qur'an is fundamentally different from that presented by Christianity/Bible, and thus from the view of God Arabian Christians have. Qur'an and Islam reject the Christian trinity, Jesus being the son of God, his death on the cross as substitutional sin offering, and his resurrection. - In the Qur'an, God is only the creator, not the father of his children. He does not reveal himself, he remains a mystery, and he is concealed. Because he is absolutely sovereign and almighty, his decision on each human in the Last Judgement cannot be predicted.

"He, the God of Abraham and all prophets, the one and only, existing in and of himself and outside of time and space, risen above any definition, transcendent and immanent, just and merciful God has, in his omnipotence, created the world, and will sustain it until the Last Day, the day of judgement."

Here, the indirect presumption is made that many of the Qur'anic prophets also known in the OT and preachers(?) of the biblical message (Adam, Moses, David, Job, Jesus) are, from an Islamic point of view, preachers of the Islam. Abraham is regarded as the founder of the Ka'aba, the main sanctuary of pilgrimage in Mecca. This view of Islam as "primal religion" of mankind, existing since Adam, is one of the largest obstacles in the dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, because Islam is considered to be superior and corrective to all other religions.

"3. The Qur'an is the verbal revelation of God"

Muslims believe that God has revealed himself repeatedly through prophets, most recently in the seventh century of western time through Muhammad, the "seal of the prophets". This revelation, as the unaltered word of God, can be found in the Qur'an, which was explained by Muhammad. His statements and patterns of behaviour are handed down in the so-called sunna. Both form the basis of Islamic faith, Islamic law, and Islamic way of life."

Here, the “Charter” implies that the prophets of OT and NT, too, proclaimed Islam, and that Muhammad, the “seal of the prophets”, finally brought the Qur’an, the only “unaltered” word of God, whereas OT and NT are considered to be corrupted and outdated scripture – a clear devaluation of Jewish/Christian scripture. The “sunna” also contains reports of Muhammad’s dealings with his opponents, the Jewish and Christian minorities, the exile and annihilation of three large Jewish tribes in Medina, and the persecution of those who abandoned Islam.

“4. We believe in the prophets of the One God

Muslims venerate all prophets preceding Muhammad, among them Jesus and Moses.”

This means the veneration of the “preceding prophets” as preachers of Islam (see above), not as they are described in OT and NT. In the Qur’an, Jesus is only a human being, an emissary who preaches Islam and predicts the arrival of Muhammad. The crucial point and culmination of the biblical scriptures, which show Jesus as the Son of God, is labelled blasphemous by the Qur’an.

“They believe that the Qur’an has restored and confirmed the original truth, the pure monotheism not only of Abraham, but of all God’s emissaries.”

Here, it is imputed that Jews and Christians have left “pure monotheism” and thus have no longer the “original truth”. This accusation is directed particularly at the trinitarian faith of Christians, which is considered to be tritheism in Islam, as “shirk” (ascribing another person to God) – the biggest, unforgivable, sin in Islam. This a clear renunciation of biblical core messages which have been believed by every Christian church at all times, as well as an absolute exaltation of Islam. How can the ZMD start a “dialogue” with the Christian churches when they consider Islam to be a “restoration” of the true religion, whereas Christian beliefs are considered blasphemous?

“5. Man has to give account on the Last Day

Muslims believe that man, as far as he has a free will, is solely responsible for his behaviour, and will have to account for it on the Last Day.”

The direct responsibility of man in the Judgement, and the assumption that man can do good, if he only obeys God’s commandments, are a consequence of the rejection of Jesus’ substitutional expiatory death on the cross.

“6. Muslim men and women have the same task in life

Muslim man and woman both consider it their task of life to know God, to serve him, and follow his commandments. This serves as a way to achieve equality, liberty, justice, brotherliness, and prosperity, too.”

What is meant by this formulation? Since there is no equality of man and woman in Islam – as is fundamental in the German constitutional law -, since man is favoured over woman by law, and she always owes him obedience, the question remains how and between whom Islam intends to achieve “equality” and “justice”. In Islamic countries, there is no “equality” between Muslims and non-Muslims, either, because Muslims always enjoy more comprehensive rights. Such topics as woman’s limited capacity to act, the separation of the sexes common in Islam, polygyny allowed

by the Qur'an, the practice of forced marriages exercised in some Muslim families living in Germany, woman's diminished rights of inheritance and bearing witness according to Islamic law, a husband's right, chartered in the Qur'an, to beat his wife, female circumcision in some Islamic countries, and others, are not even mentioned in the "charter".

"7. The five pillars of Islam

The main duties of Muslims are the five pillars of Islam: the statement of faith, the five daily prayers, the fasting during Ramadan, the mandatory contribution (zakat), and the pilgrimage to Mecca."

Because there is no supreme teaching authority in Islam, it is very difficult to determine what is, or is not, considered to be "Islamic" beyond these "main duties". This makes the definition of "the" Islam very difficult, and Islam to a changeable contact. A reference to the jihād is missing here, too, although jihād is referred to as the sixth pillar of Islam by many theologians. The subject of jihād occurs nowhere in the charter. A clear rejection of violence, terrorism, and the fight against the western/Christian majority society, could remove much mistrust against Muslims, as is frequently demanded by Muslim dialog partners.

"8. Therefore, Islam is faith, ethics, societal order, and way of life at the same time"

The all-embracing nature of the system "Islam" is a central thought in Islam, but here it remains vague. The system "Islam" contains also the religious legitimation of the Islamic criminal law (amputation of hand or foot, flogging, stoning) the unequal treatment of women and minorities and their discrimination in legal matters. Life under the terms of Islam is, according to Muslim belief, possible only in places where Islamic law is valid; where, for example, marriages are performed or divorced in an Islamic way. This, however, leads either to the subjugation of all population groups or to a parallel society.

"Islam is a teaching neither negating the world nor totally focused on this life. Instead, it is a middle course between both. Being focused on God, Muslim man and woman are indeed theocentric, but in search of the best of both worlds."

From a Muslim point of view, the "best of both worlds" is always the obedience to Allah's will revealed in Qur'an and tradition. Qur'an and sunna (traditional habits of Muhammad) are the guide for life in both this and the next world.

"Therefore, Islam is faith, ethics, societal order, and way of life at the same time. Wherever they are, Muslims are called to actively serve the common welfare in their daily lives, and to solidarity with their fellow believers all over the world."

It remains unclear how Muslims want to "actively serve the common welfare". By their active support of the current non-Islamic form of government, the secular democracy? In Islamic thinking, "common welfare" develops only under the sharia, the perfect divine law. How do we have to understand the call to "solidarity"? It is not solidarity with all humans that is demanded here. The German, Christian public is not the partner in solidarity, only the Muslim community in Germany and all over the world! From the Islamic sense of justice, solidarity always extends first

and foremost to Muslims among themselves. But when the “charter” is meant to be a matter of clarifying the relation to the German state and society, a call is missing to Muslims all over the world to declare their solidarity with non-Muslims, too, to stand up for their welfare and human rights when they, as non-Islamic minorities, are oppressed.

“9. Islam is not concerned with the abolition of wealth

Islam is not concerned with the abolition of wealth, but with the abolition of poverty. Islam protects private property committed to community and also environment, and encourages entrepreneurial initiative and responsibility.”

This formulation remains unclear, too. Why is the protection of private property constricted? What is “private property committed to community and also environment”?

“10. Islamic law is binding for Muslims in the diaspora”

“Diaspora” refers to the dispersion of a religious (or ethnic) group from their homeland among other peoples and lands. This article therefore applies at first to that situation, as long as Muslims are a minority. Nothing is said as to how Muslims act when they are the majority. As part of a contract, this article would lose its significance once the “diaspora” is ended.

“Muslims are allowed to live in any country, provided they can meet their religious main duties. The Islamic law obliges Muslims in the diaspora to basically adhere to the local legal order.”

Meeting the “religious main duties” is mentioned even before the obligation to adhere to the local legal order. Muslims are first and foremost committed to their religious law and its main duties, the obligation to adhere to local law is secondary. Here, again, arises the question of diaspora: Respecting the local legal order is demanded only as long as they are a minority. Additionally, a renunciation of jihâd is again missing; it is at best deemed to be postponed for politically thinking Muslims in a minority situation, but never ended, as long as non-Islamic countries exist.

“In this sense, the issue of a visa, residence permit, and naturalisation are considered as contracts to be kept by Muslim minorities.”

In German language use, “in this sense” is a limitation which, in this context, suggests that requirements and rules of the German state to regulate the social life of minority and majority are to be adhered to in the diaspora situation, but for the present only only in this situation.

“11. Muslims approve of the division of government in three parts, and the constitutional and democratic fundamental order granted by the constitutional law

Whether German citizens or not, the Muslims represented by the Central Council therefore approve of the division of government in three parts, and the constitutional and democratic fundamental order granted by the German constitutional law, including the pluralism of political parties, right to vote and eligibility of women, as well as freedom of religion. Therefore, they accept, too, the right to change the religion, to have a different or no religion at all. The Qur’an forbids all execution of

force and all coercion in matters of faith.”

This article must be seriously questioned. The formulations “accept” and “Muslims ... therefore approve of the ... fundamental order” – in the light of the preceding article and its general elevation of Islamic law over all other laws – do not mean that Muslims firmly commit themselves to keep these principles in the long run and especially when the diaspora situation is ended (see above). The assurance of free change of religion or irreligion is especially astonishing because the sharia demands capital punishment for apostates from Islam, and the “charter” nowhere disavows the sharia as eternally valid law. The ZMD chairman, Nadeem Elyas, recently commented on the apostasy from Islam: “Criminal prosecution should be provided only in cases when apostasy from Islam is connected with a rejection of public authority and riots.”⁶ Since renunciation of Islam, which is a supporting pillar for the state in an Islamic country, is always considered to be a rejection of state order, apostasy is, legally speaking, always considered to be riot and high treason. The ZMD is called upon to give a more unambiguous opinion on the question of renouncing Islam. If the ZMD indeed advocates unrestricted change of religion, it represents an outside position within Islam.

“12. We do not aim at the creation of a ‘clerical’ theocracy

We do not aim at the creation of a ‘clerical’ theocracy. In fact, we welcome the system of the Federal Republic of Germany, within which state and religion harmonically refer to each other.”

The rejection of a “clerical theocracy” is meaningless because sunni Islam knows no clergy. Neither is a “theocracy” envisioned in sunni Islam. The highest ruler is expected to apply Islamic law. Shiites, at most, would declare themselves for a “theocracy”, but that has to be under the guidance of an imam, not a clergy. Since Islam in general knows no clergy, the question remains why the ZMD does not explicitly declare themselves against the creation of a state under the sharia. The “welcoming” of the system of the Federal Republic of Germany is a very elastic word. What is greeted today can be rejected tomorrow. Many Muslims do indeed welcome the system of the Federal Republic of Germany because it offers, through democracy, freedom of opinion, and the protection of religious groups, many possibilities of activity even to those political groups which are prohibited to them in their countries of origin.

“13. No contradiction exists between Islamic teachings and the core content of Human Rights

No contradiction exists between the individual rights, anchored in the Qur’an and granted by God, and the core content of the western declaration of human rights.”

A clear and unrestricted acknowledgement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations is missing here. What is the “core content” of the human rights? If the ZMD advocates the “western human rights”, a decided renunciation of those passages of Islamic law that contradict the UN human rights declaration (capital punishment for apostasy from Islam, stoning in case of adultery, amputation in case of theft, obligation to the jihād, unequal treatment of women, etc.) is missing. Nadeem Elyas said elsewhere that “one has to discuss several points of human rights”⁷.

“We, too, support the intended protection of the individual against misuse of governmental force.”

What “misuse of governmental force” is, remains unclear. Which individuals are currently suffer from “misuse of governmental force”? Could this possibly mean that Muslim groups shall be protected from the grasp of the secular state?

“Islamic law commands Muslims to treat equal things equally and allows them to treat unequal things unequally. The command of Islamic law to accept the local legal order includes the acceptance of German marriage law, law of inheritance, and adjective law.”

It can be assumed that the formulation “treat equal things equally and unequal things unequally” aims at the unequal treatment of women, but also of Muslims and non-Muslims, legally anchored in Islam, and would thus contradicting the “local legal order”. The “acceptance of the local legal order” does obviously not prohibit the aspiration to change it by lawsuits up to the Federal Constitutional Court (example: halal butchering). This example shows that at least politically active Muslim groups will always strive to raise Islamic law in the host country, to be able to live Islam fully valid.

“14. Stamped by Jewish-Christian-Islamic heritage and enlightenment

The European culture is stamped by its classical Roman/Greek, as well as Jewish-Christian-Islamic heritage and the enlightenment. It is deeply influenced by Islamic philosophy and civilisation. In today’s transition from Modern to Post-Modern, too, Muslims want to make a crucial contribution to coping with crises. Among others, the affirmation of religious pluralism recognised by the Qur’an falls under this rubric,”

While the “charter” “affirms religious pluralism”, this has to be seen against the background that Qur’an and tradition know this pluralism only in such a form that Islam is the law-making, state guiding force to which minorities have to submit, as “wards” (Arab. dhimmis). In Islam, this is deemed to be a proof of its “tolerance”, but is not tolerance in a western sense.

“the rejection of any form of racism and chauvinism, as well as the healthy way of life of a society that rejects any kind of addiction.”

Here, too, precise contents are missing. Muslim apologists have admittedly often pointed out that Islam rejects racism. It is clear, however, that Islam attributes the highest rank in society to Muslims (“you are the best community that has ever developed among mankind ...”, sura 3,110), views “owners of scripture” (Jews and Christians) as secondclass citizens, and grants no lasting right to exist to all people of a different or no faith. “The healthy way of life of a society” is always, in Islamic understanding, possible only below the sharia. And what is the ZMD’s position to the topics of anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism?

“15. The emergence of a unique Islamic identity in Europe is necessary”

How would “the emergence of a unique Islamic identity in Europe” look like? Are Muslims willing

to blend in in Europe, or do they demand the establishment of Islamic law, which would result in the formation of a sub-culture and parallel society? With the commitment to a “unique Islamic identity” in Europe, the “charter” does not show the way to integration.

“The Qur’an invites man time and again to make use of his reason and his power of observation.”

Islam sees itself as the “reasonable” religion par excellence. Whoever “makes use of his reason” will accept Islam, this is the corresponding phrasing of Islamic theology. Therefore, the call to “reason” here has to be taken as a call to Islam.

“Islamic teachings are, in this sense, enlightening and was spared serious conflicts between religion and natural science.”

This is, sure enough, only the Islamic perception. In a world which tolerates no official criticism of religion, natural sciences and all other fields of research have to submit to Islam and its authorities. Critics occasionally paid a very high price, up to the loss of their lives.

“In accordance with that, we promote a contemporary understanding of Islamic sources, which accommodates the background of the problematic of modern life and the emergence of a unique Islamic identity in Europe.”

A “contemporary understanding of Islamic sources” is, in Islamic understanding, not necessarily a possibility for criticism, modern interpretation or enlightenment, but only the application of the traditional to modern reality.

“16. Germany is the centre of our interest and activity

The Central Council is mainly concerned with the matters of the Islam and the Muslims in Germany, as well as German society. Without neglecting the connections to the Islamic world, Germany shall be not only the centre of life for the local Muslim population, but also the centre of their interests and their activity.”

What exactly does this mean? What kind of “interest” and “activity” are Muslims supposed to develop in Germany? The sense of life, in Islamic understanding, is the raising of, and obedience to, the laws of the sharia and the defence and propagation of Islam (Arab. Da’wa).

“17. Removal of prejudices by transparency, openness and dialogue

The Central council sees one of their most important tasks in the creation of a basis for mutual trust which allows a constructive social life of Muslims with the majority of society, and all other minorities. To this task belong the removal of prejudices by education and transparency, as well as openness and dialogue.”

A commitment to “openness, dialogue, education, and transparency” is very positive. “Mutual trust”, however, can only be created when the premises for one’s own thinking are laid bare, including those where non-Muslims assume critical points (turning away from Islam, the question of women, etc.). Does a “constructive social life” include the acceptance of the churches as dialogue partners? In that case, it should be formulated accordingly. The “removal of prejudices” is often demanded from Muslim side, but, in the Islamic context, means first and foremost that

non- Muslims are not allowed to voice criticism of Islam.

“18. We are indebted to the whole society

The Central Council feels indebted to the entire society and is keen to make, in co-operation with all other societal groups, a material contribution to tolerance and ethics, as well as to environment and animal protection.”

It is not stated what the Muslim “contribution” to “tolerance”, “ethics”, “environment and animal protection” is to be. The halal butchering enforced by law shows that the German animal protection law is just not regarded. Will Muslims thus campaign primarily for the enforcement of Islamic interests in these areas?

“They condemn violations of human rights all over the world ,and volunteers as partner in the fight against discrimination, xenophobia, racism, sexism, and violence.”

The question remains: Which “violations of human rights” does Islam condemn? Even the persecution and killing of Islamic apostates as demanded by the sharia? Does Islam stand out against the unequal treatment (from a western point of view: discrimination) of women and minorities, too, codified in Islam? Or does it only demand the fight against the discrimination of Muslims?

“19. Integration with preservation of the Islamic identity

The Central Council stands for the integration of the Muslim population into society, with preservation of their Islamic identity, and supports all endeavours that aim for language education and naturalisation.”

The desire for language education is to be commended. However, this desire should be followed by an enhanced readiness to make use of existing possibilities and send children to German speaking kindergartens, and wives to German language courses.

“20. A worthy way of life amidst society

In addition, the Central Council sees their task, in co-operation with all other Islamic institutions, in making a worthy, Muslim, way of life amidst society possible for Muslims living in Germany, within the scope of the constitutional law (CL) and the applicable law.”

What is a “worthy, Muslim, way of life”? A life according to the laws of Islam? It is amazing how concrete and clearly comprehensible the following demands are phrased. The question does arise whether – given all these demands were wholeheartedly fulfilled – the raising of a parallel society, and the ghettoisation of Muslims would be encouraged.

“To this belong, among others: introduction of Islamic education in German language,”

“The numerous conditions on that Islamic education can take place at all (e.g., under supervision of the German supervisory school authority), which contents of

teaching it is allowed to have (Does it teach the equality of women anchored in the CL? Does it stand up for the sharia's corporeal punishment?), how Judaism and Christianity are displayed (devaluating, as in the Qur'an?), and many more. "the creation of professorships for the academic education of teachers of Islamic religion and prayer reciters (imams),"

The basic principles for the education of these people, the question of who is allowed to educate them, and the content mediated during the education remain open.

"the licence to build inner-city mosques,"

Large mosques are not only assembly buildings, they also demonstrate the presence of Islam. They are frequently connected with Islamic associations. The question remains open what they think of these sponsors, e.g., the Islamic Community "Milli Görüs" (IGMG) which is watched by the protection of the constitution. What right of control does the state have in this matter? How about the building of Islamic facilities affiliated to mosques (Qur'an schools etc.)?

"the permission of calls to prayer amplified by loudspeakers,"

The dispute over noise protection and negative freedom of religion remains open; for (different from church bells which transport no confession) non-Muslim citizens cannot be expected to listen to the Islamic credo of the truth of Islam several times per day, amplified by loudspeakers – which would be permitted no Christian church. The call to prayer amplified by loudspeakers does not belong to the Islamic teachings of duties, but is used to propagate Islam. "respect for Islamic dress order in schools and civil service," How about the ideologic neutrality of the state, which forbids officials in public service the propagation of their ideological confession? The official is, as a representative of the state, bound to religious neutrality.

"the participation of Muslims in supervisory boards of the media,"

Muslims shall be selected by what criteria? From which ethnic, theological, and religious groups? Islam has no representative Muslim contact for politics and media.

"the execution of the Federal Constitutional Court's sentence regarding halal butchering,"

The demand of the Central Council not only for halal butchering of animals, but to do so without anaesthetising the animals, is not mentioned here. The German animal protection law was overruled here.

"the employment of Muslim military chaplains,"

The question arises again how, from the numerous Muslim organisations in Germany, those shall be selected who would be authorised to submit military chaplains. When it comes to dietary rules, the institution (setup?) of prayer rooms, etc., so much consideration is already shown in hospitals, kindergartens, and the military, as Christians can never expect in the Islamic world.

"Muslim care in medical and social institutions,"

This is already fact, or at least possible, in many institutions, provided that suitable Muslim people are available.

“national protection of the two Islamic holidays,”

Muslim employees have the freedom to take a day off at the Islamic holidays. Most Muslim students already either do not attend school on these days, or do so on a very limited basis.

“the establishment of Muslim cemeteries and graveyard.”

The majority of Muslim dead is transported into their countries of origin, anyway. More and more cemeteries provide Muslim graveyards, too, and sometimes Muslims, for religious reasons, are permitted coffin-less burial, which is otherwise forbidden in this country.

“21. Not affiliated with any political party

The Central Council is not affiliated with any political party. Elective Muslims will vote for those candidates which will stand up strongest for their rights and aims, and show the greatest appreciation for Islam.”

Here, it remains open how “standing up strongest” and the “greatest appreciation” for the – also not explained – rights and aims of Muslims are defined.

Epilogue

As a summary, it can be said that the following points of the “charter” are especially problematic:

- The small number of ZMD members.
- Are the obligations of Muslims mentioned here still valid when the Islam outgrows its diaspora situation?
- Important topics, as the position of women, minority rights, persecution of apostates, the jihâd, the judgement of suicide assassinations, or the persecution of Christians in the Islamic world, are not discussed.
- Though “clerical theocracy” is rejected, the establishment of the sharia in Germany is not.
- The term “peace” is closely connected with the Islam and the devotedness to Allah. It is implied that peace comes through Islam, and that outside of Islam, no peace exists. Thus, Islam is presented as the “ideal” order, and placed above all other religions.
- The relation to the Christian churches, to which 2/3 of all Germans belong, is not mentioned at all, the churches are nowhere accepted as dialogue partners.

The following topic could have been mentioned in the “charter”, too:

- The fashion in which a Christian-Islamic dialogue can be concretely conducted.
- The question how the equitable coexistence of Christians and Muslims can be concretely formed.
- Mention of the special problems of interfaith marriages between Christians and Muslims, and the education of their children.

- Assurance of endeavours for a non-degrading description of Christian faith in Islamic religious education, as well as in Islamic publications.
- A comment on the statements of the sharia on Christians and converts to Christianity.
- Ways and possibilities by which Muslims in Germany can actively stand up for an improvement of the situation of Christians in Islamic countries.

The “charter” is a first step toward the discussion of the mostly unsettled relations between the non-Muslim majority and the Muslim minority. However, many questions are still open. It is still to be hoped that these questions are satisfactorily answered in the subsequent dialogue by additional explanations from the ZMD and the other Muslim umbrella organisations.

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1. Available at: ZMD, Indestraße 93, D-52249 Eschweiler, Germany; sekretariat@zentralrat.de. [↩](#)
 2. For example, the “Charta of Medina” and the contract of al-Hudaybiya Muhammad concluded in 628 aD. [↩](#)
 3. See P. Uphoff in [“Islam und cristlicher Glaube”, 2/2001, p. 22.](#) [↩](#)
 4. So, e.g., the German magazine “al-Islam” (2/2002), issued the Islamic Centre Munich (Islamisches Zentrum München). [↩](#)
 5. Halal butchering means that the animal is killed by cutting its throat so that it bleeds to death. [↩](#)
 6. “Hinterländer Anzeiger”, 2002-03-24. [↩](#)
 7. “Hinterländer Anzeiger”, 2002-03-24. [↩](#)