

Islamic lobbying

Over the past twenty years, a large number of Muslim organisations have established themselves in Germany, all of which have explicit social and political aims. The success story of the Muslim organisation Inssan e.V. in Berlin can be seen as exemplary of this development of political Islam. This report covers its foundation, turbulent times, networks, cross-connections, legal gateways, religious solidarity, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, experts, politicians and, finally, its recognition as a provider of independent youth welfare services.

By Carsten Frerk.

I. Preliminary remarks	1
II. Initial situation	2
1. Foundation, Turbulence and Initial Networking	4
2. Further problems and cross-connections	11
3. Legal door-openers	15
4. Religious backing	17
5. Consolidation and academic support	19
6. Inssan projects	23
7. What am I? And if so, how many?	33
8. What kind of Islam does Inssan e. V. represent?	36
9. Establishment, further networking and consolidation	42
10. Cui bono?	48
11. Empowerment	51
12. Do ut des	52
13. Conclusion	53
14. Afterword	55

I. Preliminary remark

As research into and debate on the role of Islam in Berlin (and in Germany) is a politically and emotionally 'minefield', it seems sensible to outline my own position at the outset in order to dispel any speculation about the author's motives.

My position on the relationship between state and religion is simple: I am in favour of clear religious freedom, which, however, does not yet exist in Germany in this form. For me, religious freedom means the clear organisational and financial separation of religion and state, so that religious communities do not have to curry favour with the state or please it in order to maintain or gain advantages over others. This is the concept put forward by the liberal Friedrich Naumann, who demanded in the Weimar National Assembly in 1919: 'Free churches in a free state'. This concept also aligns with the view of the Federal Constitutional Court that the state is the 'home of all citizens', and must therefore remain neutral on matters of religion or faith; furthermore (in accordance with Article 135 of the Weimar Constitution), state laws take precedence over religious precepts.

I came across this topic rather by chance. Some friends of mine had taken part in a workshop where a list of participants was handed out. Whilst looking to see who was taking part, they paused and asked me if I knew who or what 'Inssan e.V.' was. I didn't know either. However, an initial overview of the research sparked my interest in investigating the history of Inssan e.V. over the years. As a political scientist, I have the necessary objectivity; I myself have no interest in religion (I am unbaptised) and have no party affiliations. All facts and opinions are backed up by sources and are therefore verifiable.

As a political scientist, I have been examining for several years how the relationship between state and religion has actually been negotiated and has played out in Germany. Having previously published a detailed study on Christian lobbying ('Kirchenrepublik Deutschland'), the following is a contribution on Islamic lobbying, illustrated by the political success of a smaller Muslim organisation in Berlin.

II. Background

Since the mid-1990s, debates on integration have also taken place in Germany, such as the controversies over 'Leitkultur' versus 'Multikulti'. Distinct camps soon formed, whose members did not shy away from expressing clear positions. Two female politicians were particularly prominent in this regard: *Claudia Roth*, then chair of the Bündnis90/Die Grünen party, and *Rita Süssmuth* of the CDU.

Among the Greens, it is not just *Claudia Roth*. In November 2000, *Christian Ströbele* said:

"The Greens have always identified with the concept of a multicultural society. It remains the goal of Bündnis 90/The Greens' policy. Multiculturalism – allowing many cultures to flourish – is, in the current immigration debate, the best antithesis to the ominous 'German Leitkultur'."

In November 2004, the Green Party leaders, *Bütikofer* and *Roth*, called for a [renewed justification of the multicultural society](#):

"A fire of intolerance and xenophobia has broken out in the debate within the Federal Republic. It had already been smouldering. We must put it out again. This is about the multicultural society; it is also about freedom. For without multiculturalism, freedom is inconceivable in modern societies.

We Greens have long been pioneers of 'multiculturalism'. It stands for an indisputable reality and, at the same time, for a powerful ideal of freedom that respects different ways of life. Multiculturalism refers not only to ethnic and religious plurality, but to the very process of pluralisation within Western, postmodern societies as a whole. Underlying this is a culture of respect that recognises 'different ways of life', rather than merely tolerating or permitting them. (...)

The ability to speak German is key to participating in our society. That is why we have advocated for compulsory language courses in the Immigration Act."

This emphasis on German as a common language is also the 'linking element' to *Rita Süssmuth*, CDU, President of the Bundestag from 1988 to 1998, who was appointed in 2000 as chair of an Independent Commission on Immigration, which in July 2001 presented a comprehensive report entitled '[Shaping Immigration – Promoting Integration](#)', in which it states, amongst other things (p. 200):

"The willingness to acquire German language skills, as well as recognition of the Basic Law, its values and our legal system, are necessary conditions for integration. Integration is a social process in which everyone living in a society is involved at all times. The will to integrate is indispensable. This will to integrate is expressed in the fact that every individual, on their own initiative, endeavours to integrate socially. This applies to both native-born citizens and immigrants. As a political task, integration aims to enable immigrants to participate on an equal footing in social, economic, cultural and political life, whilst respecting cultural diversity."

And with regard to Islamic organisations in particular, the document states (p. 236):

"The blanket suspicion of fundamentalism directed at Islamic organisations in Germany is unfounded. Undoubtedly, there are Islamic organisations here that do not feel committed to the liberal-democratic values of our society. There are also instances of behaviour amongst migrants that are at odds with the values enshrined in the Basic Law – such as the equality of women. On the other hand, numerous Muslim associations are committed to the integration of their members into German society and carry out valuable social and educational work that promotes integration. These Muslim associations and organisations, which are striving for integration, could serve as points of contact for the Muslim population within local communities and municipalities. However, offers of dialogue must come to an end if the values of the Basic Law are called into question or if there is an intention to exploit the situation for political ends. If minorities do not show acceptance and tolerance towards the majority society, they cannot expect to receive it in return."

In November 1999, the [first public expert discussion on Muslims in Germany](#) took place in Bonn, hosted by the Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Relating to Foreigners, Marieluise Beck.

In his 2004 paper '[Organised Islam in Germany and Social Integration](#)', *Johannes Kandel* (*Friedrich Ebert Foundation*) describes the situation of organised Islam in Germany as a "process of modernisation or adaptation":

“The institutionalisation and organisation of Islam – beginning in the 1980s – have increased significantly and have at the same time been subject to constant change. The path led from ‘traditional’ foreigner’s associations and ‘backyard mosques’ to a network of mosque associations and Islamic federations, which have gained significant influence both amongst their own members and within German mainstream society. They claim to provide Muslims with a ‘*comprehensive*’ range of services: religious, social and cultural advice and support; the organisation of leisure activities (e.g. cultural and sports clubs); legal aid; education; the training of theological specialists and leadership personnel; missionary work; and political advocacy. [...]

The leadership of these groups often consists of second-generation migrants; they are educationally advantaged, self-assured and politically active. Here, too, we find a growing number of converts. They often act as ‘gatekeepers’ in communication between first-generation officials and the wider society. Their familiarity with the language and local cultures, combined with their level of education, makes them ideal as activists and spokespersons for Muslim organisations. Both the ‘old guard’ and the younger converts take on important roles within the organisations, particularly with regard to theological and political education. They campaign with great enthusiasm and self-confidence for the social recognition of Islam, which they – as a religious community – regard as disadvantaged, socially marginalised and discriminated against in comparison to the Christian churches.”

The French scholar of Islam, Gilles Kepel, outlines a broader context; according to a [report \(in February 2000\)](#), he had already pointed out as early as 1996 that Islamic groups had changed their attitudes towards Western Europe – shifting from conflict avoidance to the creation of ‘Islamised spaces’:

“Until the end of the 1980s, Islamist groups did not regard Western Europe as a territory of Islam (Dar al-Islam). Western Europe, within the wider realm of the unbelievers (Dar al-kufr), was considered a territory of contractual peace (Dar al-ahd), where Muslims did not allow open conflict to arise with the unbelieving environment. “In concrete terms, this meant that Europe was sacred territory, a refuge for all movements persecuted in their countries of origin. The groups therefore avoided any conflict,” says Kepel.

A shift in self-perception has taken place. Europe is now regarded as Dar al-Islam. This means that Muslims are at home here and must be able to live according to the rules of Sharia. As this is only possible to a limited extent for the minority, at the very least Islamised spaces must be created in which a moral order determined by Islam applies. This could be a school class, a street or a neighbourhood. Only in this way can social peace be maintained and drug addiction and crime be combated. [...]

For Gilles Kepel, this logic brings a process of cultural separation to its conclusion and fosters a form of social organisation in which closed communities stand in opposition to one another. The extent to which this development of parallel societies has already progressed can be observed in the area around Boppstraße in Berlin-Kreuzberg. There, there are increasing complaints from local residents who are harassed by extremist Muslims because of their ‘revealing’ clothing, or are sometimes even spat on.”

In Berlin, the Islamic Federation has been campaigning since 1980 to be allowed to provide Islamic religious education in schools. The education authorities had refused this, on the grounds that the Islamic Federation was not a religious community. The Federation fought for this recognition in court and was recognised as a religious community by the Berlin Higher Administrative Court in 1998. The education authorities continued to delay the start of the programme because, according to a [newspaper report](#), the teaching content primarily lacked ‘the ability to make one’s own decisions and to freely develop one’s conscience, as well as equality between men and women’. However, the Higher Administrative Court ruled that the school authorities were not permitted to scrutinise the content:

‘The current Berlin School Act, however, leaves no doubt as to jurisdiction. Section 23 states that religious education is the responsibility of the churches, religious communities and communities of conviction. The ruling of the Berlin Higher Administrative Court is accordingly clear: the judges denied the school authorities the right to assess the content of the lessons.

The Islamic Federation is controversial because it is classified as extremist and is under observation by the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution. So far, however, apparently without any findings. In its judgement, the Higher Administrative Court stated that there were no indications that the lessons deviated from the state’s educational objectives.

Nevertheless, the Turkish Federation in Berlin-Brandenburg fears the issue may be exploited for political purposes and is calling for the matter to be made a top priority.”

When the Senate failed to act, the Federal Administrative Court ruled in February 2000 that the Senator for Education must ‘[implement](#) the Higher Administrative Court’s ruling [without delay](#)’. From September 2001, following a further appeal to the Administrative Court, the Islamic Federation was permitted to begin teaching Islam in two school classes.

It was during this period and against this social backdrop that the Muslim organisation Inssan e. V. was founded and developed; its development serves as a prime example illustrating the various stages on the path to success.

1. Foundation, Turbulence and Initial Networking

On 7 January 2003, ‘Inssan für kulturelle Interaktion e. V.’ was entered into the Berlin Register of Associations. The articles of association had already been approved on 25 October 2002 and, as Inssan itself writes:

“Some preparatory work still had to be done before the first members gathered for the ceremonial founding meeting on 25 October 2002.”

Prior to formal registration, there were, of course, the founding discussions, which began in 2001. It is said that around 40 people came together in the autumn of 2001. No further details are reported. In ‘Islamic Community Life in Berlin, 2006’, it states:

“The Inssan Association – a word meaning ‘human being’ or ‘humanity’ in Turkish, Arabic and Urdu – was founded in 2001 by young people of Arab background with the aim of breaking new ground. Despite having only around 40 members, the professionally organised association is very active in Berlin with its two permanent staff members and interns.”¹

And what is new about Inssan is described as follows:

“As in Berlin, in many major cities across Europe a new generation of Muslims is striving on all fronts for acceptance, to be recognised both as Muslims and as Germans, French or English. The spaces that emerge as a result – and which they organise themselves – are not merely the result of generational differences. They are also an expression of the attempt to take a stand against a predominantly negative perception of Islam in Western societies – a self-imposed task that occupies these young Muslims daily. They are often viewed with scepticism and mistrust, but they also find a sympathetic response and provide food for thought on how to engage with Islamic organisations.”²

What is remarkable about this account is that it is almost identical to the [self-description of the Muslim Youth in Germany e.V.](#), which was founded eight years before Inssan (in 1994, under the [slogan: ‘Muslim? Young? German? That’s fine!’](#)), eight years before Inssan (2002).

“Muslim Youth in Germany e.V. (MJD) is the only independent German Muslim youth organisation. It has set itself the aim of bringing Muslim young people together and supporting them in their search for identity and personal development. Through a variety of activities, young people are encouraged to discover their talents and become socially engaged.

In the mid-1990s, there were very few youth programmes available, most of which were organised by mosque communities and took place in the members’ native languages. Often, these programmes were not closely enough aligned with the young peoples lived experiences.

The MJD wanted to change this: from the outset, it saw itself not merely as a German-speaking organisation, but as a German organisation. It sought to represent young Muslims who regarded Germany as the centre of their lives and their home. The Muslim faith and everyday life in Germany are not at odds with one another, and the young people wanted to play an active role in social debates and processes.

The vast majority of members have a migrant background, though no single country of origin dominates. Their parents come from various countries, including Germany, Afghanistan, Algeria, Morocco, Iran, Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey and Uzbekistan. The cultural diversity amongst its members is a distinctive feature of the MJD and sets it apart from all other Muslim youth organisations in Germany. All of the MJD’s activities, including the annual meeting with around 1,000 participants, are planned and organised independently by young people for young people.

An essential part of the MJD’s self-image is its German-Muslim identity. Young people actively experience that religious awareness is perfectly compatible with the Western way of life.

Through its work, the MJD also strengthens young people's awareness of democracy. It shows them opportunities and prospects that make life in a democratic society possible."

The same applies to the JUMA project (more on this later).

This perspective parallels developments in France (even though the majority of Muslims there originate from North Africa), as [discussed](#) by the French sociologist [Gilles Kepel](#) when he answers the question of what has changed among French Muslims since 1987 – the immigrant Muslim parents have children who are French and who also seek their identity in Islam.

"Twenty-five years ago, Muslims were immigrant workers who practised their religion only to a limited extent. They avoided pork but drank alcohol and were just as flexible with regard to halal rules as they were with regard to Ramadan. They performed their prayers as best they could. It was an Islam of submission. A quarter of a century later, Islam in France has become the Islam of France. The fathers have stayed; their children are French, they were brought up in France, but some of them feel like outsiders and alienated, mainly because of unemployment. In their youth, they were 're-Islamised' by members of the Muslim Brotherhood who came from North Africa and broke away from French society. The young people have created a substitute identity for themselves, based on what they regard as the source of their identity: the Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood or – to an even lesser extent – that of the Salafists. This form of Islam goes beyond that of their parents, which was that of the original North African rural population."

What is striking, however, regarding the period when Inssan was founded, is that the Islamist terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York took place on 9 November 2001. Consequently, the suggestion was made that Inssan e.V. – in light of Islam's image as associated with terrorism – might have been deliberately re-established with a legalistic concept.³ After all, the discussion regarding the association's articles of association etc. lasted a year.

However, this conjecture is not particularly plausible – apart from the coincidence in timing. Another hypothesis regarding the background to Inssan e.V. appears more plausible. Barbara Berreßen, project manager and initiator of *the Berlin Muslims Working Group*, [reports](#) (p. 27):

"Aktion Courage e. V. was founded in 1992. It was established in response to the xenophobic arson attacks in towns such as Mölln and Hoyerswerda. These incidents demonstrated that violence and racism were becoming increasingly aggressive in Germany. Aktion Courage e. V. sought to counteract these alarming trends through targeted anti-discrimination work. Aktion Courage e. V. sees its main task as encouraging people to stand up against discrimination and racist hostility in their everyday lives. Our project, '*Integration of Muslims and Muslim Organisations in Germany*', which began in July 1999, addresses this issue. In Berlin and Mainz, we are establishing networks between Muslim organisations and institutions within the majority society. The aim of the project is to help secure social respect for the approximately 3 million Muslims in Germany and to promote recognition of Islam as the third-largest religious community in Germany, alongside Christianity and Judaism. The pilot project is scheduled to run for three years and is funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The centrepiece of our Berlin project is the *Berlin Muslims' Working Group*. It was founded when our office opened and comprises various mosque and cultural associations as well as umbrella organisations. This working group meets at regular intervals of 6–8 weeks at the premises of Aktion Courage e.V. on Hohenfriedbergstraße. Through this Berlin Muslims Working Group, requests are formulated for the majority society regarding the integration of Muslims. Working groups are then formed within the working group to address the various key areas, such as cooperation with the German Parity Welfare Association, with the district offices of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Tempelhof-Schöneberg, Neukölln and Mitte, and the neighbourhood management organisations; the establishment of a Muslim expert group dedicated to the psychosocial counselling and care of Muslims; the initiation of language courses in mosque associations in collaboration with the VHS Mitte; and the provision of religious support in prisons and hospitals. In this context, Aktion Courage e. V. sees itself as a facilitator, establishing contacts with institutions within the majority societies."

This is precisely the socio-political 'programme' with which Inssan was founded in 2002, following the expiry of the three-year funding (since 1999) for the *Arbeitskreis Berliner Muslime*.

In November 2003, *Lydia Nofal*, then managing director of Inssan, replied to the question “What is the composition of your association?” in the Berlin city newspaper **Scheinschlag**:

“Most are students or academics, and an increasing number are schoolgirls. The nationalities are mixed: Arabs, Turks and Germans, Bosnians, Pakistanis and Kurds, Sunnis and Shias. At present, we pray in different mosques: some at DITIB, some attend the Islamic Federation, and many go to Arab mosques.”

The anthropologist Esra Özyürek spoke to converts in Germany in 2014/2015 and provides a more detailed account regarding the founding of Inssan:⁴

“Another [...] Islamic organisation with no ties to a specific school of thought and no representative character is Inssan (‘Human’). It was founded predominantly by converts who follow a significantly more orthodox interpretation of Islam than the Muslim Academy and who continue to shape the organisation to a decisive extent to this day. Inssan is funded by a group of Muslims who wish to create an Islamic umbrella organisation whose activities contribute to cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in Germany. Inssan organises events for interfaith dialogue and a campaign against forced marriages, seeks to promote coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims, documents cases of discrimination and offers training to prevent such discrimination. The founders told me that they had decided to set up a new organisation because the Turkish-Islamic organisations were so hierarchical and they had been unable to find a place within them. The association defines its strength as its openness to dialogue with all other religious groups – an aspect that distinguishes it from organisations of migrant Muslims. These organisations have even met it with a certain degree of resistance, as they see it as a rival in representing Muslims in Germany should Islam ever be granted the status of a state-recognised religion.

No further details are provided. Neither on the question of what sort of ‘umbrella organisation’ this is supposed to be, nor any explanation of what an ‘orthodox interpretation of Islam’ actually entails, nor any membership figures. In the years since then, figures have rarely been cited – neither for the number of members nor for project participants; everything remains vague, with references to ‘most’, ‘many’ and ‘relatively few’.

In keeping with this ‘openness to dialogue with all other religious groups’, Inssan e.V. operated under the name ‘Inssan für kulturelle Interaktion e.V.’ for its first ten years (2002–2012). From 2012 onwards, after the association had secured official recognition and its first funding and had begun to focus more narrowly on and distinguish itself through a ‘Islamisation’ of its work, the phrase ‘cultural interaction’ was removed from the association’s name.

1.1. Website

The first archive copy of Inssan’s website on the [Internet Archive’s ‘Wayback Machine’](#) dates from 1 March 2003. The site is available in five language versions, with their importance reflected in the order listed (as written there): 1. Turkish, 2. English, 3. French, 4. German, 5. Arabic. It is noteworthy that, for an association – with German as its explicitly stated official language – German is not the first, and therefore most important, language, but rather Turkish; that ‘English’ and ‘Arabic’ are written in English; and that ‘Frensch’ is also English, but was written phonetically in German.

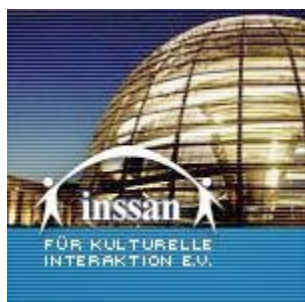
From April to November, the message reads: ‘Our website will be available again shortly!’, which was then recorded on 22 December 2003. It states: ‘What is inssan?’ Answer:

‘Inssan means to be human, to be humane. The word originates from Arabic and has found its way into all Oriental languages. Inssan is the foundation: for peaceful coexistence, for fruitful exchange, for working together rather than merely existing side by side, for enlightenment, development, education and culture.’

In the top left-hand corner is a logo depicting two stylised figures waving cloths in front of the glass dome of the Reichstag building.

These figures are immediately reminiscent of the ‘Humping Man’ – the (cheerful, dynamic) symbol and (in various forms) the distinguishing mark of various humanist organisations, including the umbrella organisation, the IHEU (International Humanist and Ethical Union). It was developed in 1965 by the British

Humanist Association. Apparently, the term 'human' and the corresponding logo were adopted directly from the English context.



1.2. Board members

The information in the register of associations allows us to compile an overview of the board members from 2003 to 2020 (see Appendix 1). This has been a period of considerable change, as there were changes to the board every year from 2003 to 2007, followed by a calmer phase from 2009 to 2012, until the association shortened its name to 'Inssan e. V.' in May 2012, after which there were again frequent changes to the board until 2015. Between 2003 and 2020, there were 17 different individuals. One relative constant has been *Lydia Nofal*, a graduate in political science, who has served on the Executive Board almost continuously (from 2003 to 2004, 2005 to 2014 and since 2015) and has been Chair since November 2015.

Since 2006, the association's managing directors have been 'ex officio members' of the executive committee, though they are not listed amongst the executive committee members. In 2003 it was *Lydia Nofal*, in 2008 it was *Imran Sagir*, and currently (since 2015) it is *Mohamad Hajjaj*.

Some of the board members have not appeared in public, whilst others demonstrate the board's links with other organisations.

- *Lydia Nofal*: Born in the Sauerland region in 1969 (aged 51 in 2020), raised as a Catholic. Studied political science in Berlin (Otto Suhr Institute) and London. Converted to Islam in 1991. Awarded a degree in political science in 1998; thesis topic: ' Hamas: Between Idealism and Pragmatism', Free University of Berlin. Marital status: Married (Arab husband, Palestinian). Has worked, amongst others, for the Palestine Human Rights Information Centre (PHRIC) in Jerusalem and the Justice Department of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza. Member of the SPD; in 2014, co-founder and one of the spokespersons for the Working Group on Muslims (AKMS) within the SPD; since 2015, Deputy Chair of the Berlin regional branch of the ZDM (Central Council of Muslims); in 2019, member of the Advisory Board of the Institute for Islamic Theology at Humboldt University, Berlin.

Lydia Nofal is referred to in the media in various ways depending on whom or what she represents (see Appendix 4): Chair of INSSAN e.V. / contributor to the juma project / political scientist / Central Council of Muslims, Berlin / project manager at RAA Berlin / Muslim Working Group within the SPD. The following illustration from a study on 'European Islam' shows just how confusing this can be:⁵

"Professors Ruggero Vimercato Sanseverino and Mouhanad Khorchide are at the forefront of the institutionalisation of Islamic theology in Germany, whilst Lamya Kaddor is regarded as a pioneer in the introduction of Islamic religious education and is also an important voice advocating for an interpretation of Islam rooted in European society. Lydia Nofal from the organisation Juma and the journalist and blogger Kübra Gümüşay describe the extent to which this work has become institutionalised and professionalised in recent years. Lydia Nofal also speaks as a representative of the Central Council of Muslims."

- *Mohamad Hajjaj*, the current managing director of Inssan e.V. (also born in Palestine), has been (since 2017) chairman of the Berlin regional association of the Central Council of Muslims (ZDM) and is listed there as a representative of the Teiba Mosque/Teiba Cultural Association, of which he has been deputy chairman since February 2013. He is also a member of the SPD and a member of the AKMS. Furthermore, he is said to be the head of the capital office of [the Palestinian Community in Germany](#). He studied business

law at Humboldt University of Berlin and, since 2002, has been the public relations officer for the Muslim Youth, whose offices in Berlin are, or were, located right next to Inssan.

- *Imran Sagir* (born 1973) Member of the Inssan Executive Board from 2007 to 2013; prior to that (2001 to 2003) he was one of the chairpersons of the Muslim Youth; he is the founder and managing director of MuTes (Muslim helpline), is involved in prison chaplaincy and in the association Leadership Berlin, of which *Lydia Nofal* is also a member.

1.3. Advisory Board

An Inssan Advisory Board has been in place since autumn 2003 (according to Inssan, since October 2004) “comprising people from the field of intercultural work”, of whom the following are named in the **Stadtzeitung** interview (2003): *Barbara John* (CDU, former Berlin Commissioner for Integration), *Gerdien Jonker* (religious studies scholar) and *Ismet Misirlioglu* (from the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Migration Advisory Board). In October 2007, the Inssan website listed a longer roster of advisory board members, and the entry for *Ismet Misirlioglu* reads: “Hardly anyone is as well known among Berlin’s Muslims as *Ismet Misirlioglu*. He heads the office of the aid organisation Islamic Relief and was one of the co-founders of the Round Table of Muslim Organisations in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg.”

For the renowned politician *Barbara John*, there are several points of connection with Inssan. Not only does she hold a degree in political science, like board member *Lydia Nofal*, but she also worked for several years in teacher training at the Free University of Berlin, specialising in ‘German as a Foreign Language’. Since July 2003, she has been the coordinator for language support at the Berlin Senate Department for Education, Science and Research and is also chair of the expert panel for integration language courses at the BAMF (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees). In 2003, the **Tagesspiegel** reported:

“‘We are German,’ says Lydia Nofal. Many also hold German citizenship, says Salah Bouabdallah, the association’s chairman and an Arab psychologist who came to Germany from France ten years ago. ‘We are part of this society and we identify with it.’

The common language of the around 40 active association members from the Arab world, Turkey or France is German. And Nofal insists that this should also be the case for the many other Muslims in Berlin. She wants to put pressure on the foreign nationals in the country: ‘Language is the most important tool.’ Talking about integration without language skills ‘makes no sense’. These are sentiments and views that have also been repeatedly expressed by Barbara John, the former Commissioner for Foreigners and current Senate Commissioner for Language Support for Migrants. John also thinks highly of Inssan. She is due to be elected to the association’s advisory board in September. Barbara John praises Inssan’s independence from religion, groups and institutions.”

In 2007, additional advisory board members were appointed, “who meet twice a year to advise the executive committee on its work and to establish contacts with various social groups”. These include *Michael Freiberg*, a CDU politician and former deputy district mayor of Neukölln, who “repeatedly champions INSSAN’s cause in the district”, and *Ernst Pulsfort*, spiritual rector of the Catholic Academy of Berlin until 2006, as well as *Thomas Hartmann*, the first editor-in-chief of the **taz**. “He regularly establishes contacts for INSSAN within the cultural scene and with journalists.”

1.4. Turmoil

As soon as the association’s articles of association had been approved, a planning application was submitted in October 2002 for a large Muslim cultural centre with a mosque on Pflügerstraße in Neukölln. The planned cultural centre was to cover an area of 6,400 square metres, including a 1,200-square-metre mosque, alongside a library, seminar rooms and catering facilities.

A multi-million project by a small academic association in the process of being established?

It would have been by far the largest mosque in Berlin, and given its scale, this points to a possible alternative motive behind the founding of Inssan e.V.: political Islam seeks a public presence, that is, the visibility of large, imposing mosques with correspondingly tall minarets. This mirrors the approach of the major Christian churches in Germany, which vehemently reject the notion that religion is a private matter.

Particularly in the wake of 9/11 and the negative image of Islam, younger political scientists are going on the offensive, under the motto: 'Out of the backyards, into the public eye!' and the advisory board members support the association.

Lydia Nofal: "The district asked Barbara John for a statement, and she portrayed our association very positively. Nevertheless, we were turned down."

Inssan moved to the Charlottenburg district of Berlin, where, however, there was also considerable resistance. When asked why Charlottenburg of all places, *Lydia Nofal* replied in an interview with the **Tagesspiegel** in January 2008 ("I don't wear a headscarf either") that Inssan wanted to bring Muslims out of the backyards and that German is spoken in the mosques:

"The Inssan association is based in Kreuzberg, but wants to build a mosque for 700 people in Charlottenburg. Won't the mosque look like a UFO there?"

Some of our members live in Charlottenburg. Besides, it's a diverse neighbourhood where many Muslims live. In the class of one member's daughter, Muslim children are in the majority. There are also two mosques.

Can't the members of Inssan pray there?"

No. For one thing, these aren't proper mosques, but factory floors being used as prayer rooms. If you want integration, Muslims must be allowed to come out of the backyards. Besides, Turkish is spoken in these mosques. We want to provide German-language services. This is the only way to overcome the Muslim community's focus on their country of origin and ethnic divisions, and to foster a European identity amongst Muslims. For many young people, it no longer makes sense to identify with their grandparents' homeland. They have grown up here; for them, Germany is home. It is for them that we want to provide services – in a representative centre."

The scale of the project is made clear in District Council document [DS No. 0828/3](#):

"On the site of the former industrial estate, incorporating the building facing Keplerstraße, a Muslim cultural centre is to be built which, in addition to a mosque (715 sq m), will also comprise a retail space (400 sq m), a community hall (500 sq m), a restaurant, a café and a canteen (250 sq m), a dialogue and information centre (200 sq m), business premises (200 sq m), administrative offices (150 sq m), seminar rooms (270 sq m), a library with a media room (90 sq m), a nursery (300 sq m), a youth club (200 sq m), a women's centre (130 sq m), office space (450 sq m) and residential units (500 sq m).

The concept is based on a total floor area of 4,355 square metres, 79 car parking spaces and 40 bicycle parking spaces. The development site is to be designated as a special zone in order to facilitate the above-mentioned uses within the overall concept."

It was not only the size of the cultural centre/mosque building or the fact that there are only a few Muslims living in Charlottenburg – so why build such a mosque? – but above all the question of funding. When it emerged that the plot was to be purchased by *Ibrahim Al-Zayat*, who had already signed the purchase agreement on behalf of the European Trust Foundation, the project came under political and media scrutiny.

Ibrahim Al-Zayat is regarded as a 'key figure' in the political and organisational rapprochement between Arab and Turkish Islamists'. Since Milli Görüş (founded in Germany in 1972/1995) is regarded as the "Turkish variant of the Muslim Brotherhood" (founded in Germany in 1960/1982)—organised independently but sharing the same ideological stance—this common ground regarding support for Inssan would seem obvious.

Ibrahim Al-Zayat was president of the Islamic Community of Germany (IGD) from 2002 to 2010; since 2018, this organisation has been known as the German Muslim Community e.V. (DMG), which is classified by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution as a "branch of the Muslim Brotherhood". *Al-Zayat* sat on the board of Islamic Relief Germany and Islamic Relief Worldwide, and is the general representative of the EMUG (European Mosque Construction and Support Association), which now manages around 300 Milli Görüş mosques in Germany. "*Al-Zayat* also embodies the connection between the two circles through his family: his wife, Sabiha el-Zayat-Erbakan, is the sister of the former chairman of Milli Görüş in Germany, Mehmet Erbakan. The organisation's founder, the Turkish Islamist Necmettin Erbakan, who died in 2011, was her uncle."

In 1997, *Al-Zayat* founded 'Consulting Form SLM' (a property management company), which had been active on behalf of Inssan in Charlottenburg. Inssan stated that the contacts were limited to 'a purely technical level'. All allegations of links to the Muslim Brotherhood were rejected by Inssan in a press release dated 23 February 2004 as "unsubstantiated".

Apart from that, Islamic Relief and Inssan e.V. share the same address: Gitschiner Straße 17, the shops on the left and right. (The building is owned by Deutsche Wohnen.) Furthermore, the office manager of Islamic Relief in Berlin, *Ismet Misirlioglu*, has also been a member of the INSSAN advisory board since 2003. In its press release of 23 February 2004, Inssan writes, seemingly unfazed by this:

"The allegations levelled against Inssan's cooperation partners have so far not been substantiated, and Inssan refuses to allow its work to be undermined by unsubstantiated allegations. The situation would certainly be different for the association if it were proven that cooperation partners rejected the fundamental values of our social order or even advocated violence.

If this is not the case, the association seeks dialogue and cooperation with representatives of both Muslim and non-Muslim organisations in order to fulfil its role in promoting integration. For, as a staunch advocate of democracy, pluralism, the rule of law and equality for all people, the association is convinced that it is only through dialogue and cooperation that these values can be upheld everywhere and the integration of Muslims into our society achieved."

The discussions in the BVV (District Council) are wide-ranging and controversial; ultimately, the project is not approved.

The decisive issue is how the organisations known as the Muslim Brotherhood and Milli Görüs are assessed. The term 'Muslim Brotherhood' is obviously straightforward ('patriarchal Muslims'), but who actually knows what 'Milli Görüs' ('National Vision') means?

This provocative, repeated call of "don't do things by halves, go all out!" had suddenly thrust the small association into the negative public spotlight – both in the media and in the District Councils – and Inssan had to [work](#) its way back to [acceptance](#) 'little by little' over the years: Through postcard campaigns against forced marriages, appeals for blood donations, football matches between priests and imams, Islam weeks, 'Kreuzberg in Conversation', a Hajj exhibition, Jewish-Muslim encounters, a joint statement on homophobia, neighbourhood initiatives, the Literary Mosque, 'Together Against Terrorism', International Women's Day, conferences, and events in schools: 'Peaceful Minds', and so on.

1.5. Initial networking

Despite unfavourable political and media coverage, Inssan is quietly forging links in all directions. The executive director, in November 2003, on the organisation's contacts with the Bündnis 90/The Greens party:

"We organised a mosque tour with the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Educational Institute. This enabled girls from different religious backgrounds to gain an insight into the diversity within the Muslim community. It was very well received, and we will be repeating it.

We are now planning a project with the Educational Institute, the non-partisan women's initiative, Aktion Courage and other organisations to promote the integration of migrant women into the labour market."

On 11 June 2004, an event will be held at the Inssan office on the topic 'What do Christians understand by the Trinity?' The speaker will be the Spiritual Rector of the Catholic Academy of Berlin, *Dr Pulsfort*. Purpose: dialogue on 'interfaith coexistence'. (*Dr Ernst Pulsfort* later became a member of the Inssan Advisory Board)

In mid-January 2005, the Inssan website stated: "Great response to the first environmental campaign by Berlin Muslims. The first environmental campaign by Berlin Muslims – organised by the INSSAN association – was a resounding success on Saturday at Paul-Lincke-Ufer. First, around 20 participants attended a seminar on the topics of 'Environmental protection in Islam' and 'Practical tips for everyday life'. They then collected litter along the Paul-Lincke-Ufer and put up signs encouraging more environmentally conscious behaviour."

On 7 April 2005, 'INSSAN' wrote on the death of *John Paul II*: 'Muslims, too, are mourning the death of John Paul II. The Berlin-based association INSSAN extends its condolences to Catholics throughout the world and honours the Pope as one of the most outstanding figures of the century.'

On 12 May 2005, *Rita Süßmuth* spoke at the *Jerusalemskirche* in Berlin at the INSSAN event 'Integration Can Work' on the topic: 'What demands does successful integration place on migrants and on the majority society?' In keeping with her views, INSSAN writes (highlighted in semi-bold):

"We are firmly convinced that multiculturalism has not failed. The coexistence of people from different cultures and religions may sometimes be difficult, but if everyone makes an effort and is willing to compromise from time to time, then everyone will benefit."

2. Further problems and cross-references

The key issue, as mentioned, is the assessment of the Muslim Brotherhood and Milli Görüş. The problem here is that the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution had classified both organisations as 'legalistic Islamism' in its annual reports.

'Legalistic' means in this context that they are not prepared to use violence (in Germany), but remain within the framework of the legal system ('march through the institutions'), and 'Islamism' means that they nevertheless pursue efforts to implement their vision of an Islamic society (key concepts: unity of religion and state, Sharia).

Being mentioned in a report by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution also has very practical disadvantages. Under German law, an association thereby loses its status as a 'charitable' legal entity and can no longer issue donation receipts.

For the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic Relief and the IGMG (Islamic Community Milli Görüş), this is of secondary importance, as they operate in an international context; for Inssan, however, it is far more significant, as, in addition to losing its charitable status, it may also be politically assessed as 'not eligible for funding', which has in fact happened.

The 2006 Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution Report (published in June 2007) states in general terms (p. 5)

"It is crucial to gather information about potential threats as early as possible and to take action against actual threats. However, it is just as important to nip Islamist radicalisation in the bud.

We will not achieve genuine security without dialogue with all those of good will. Dialogue with Muslims in our city is therefore of particular importance. We must talk with one another rather than about one another. The Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution regularly takes part in the Berlin Islam Forum, which was launched [in 2005] by the Commissioner for Integration. At federal level, there are discussions between the security authorities and Muslim organisations. Finally, the German Islam Conference is also moving in this direction. This dialogue makes our future safer. It is therefore right that, even at federal level, those whose conception of the state differs from our idea of a liberal, democratic constitutional state should not be excluded – provided they are not prepared to resort to violence. That is why it is right that there should also be discussions with groups that are close to, for example, the 'Muslim Brotherhood' and the 'Islamic Community Milli Görüş'. It is not a question of blurring the boundaries; the liberal democratic constitutional order is non-negotiable. However, it must be possible to discuss religious freedom."

Regarding the Muslim Brotherhood, it states (page 258):

"In Germany, the interests of the MB are represented by the 'Islamic Community in Germany e. V.' (IGD), founded in 1960, which is under the influence of the Egyptian MB. Several Islamic centres in Germany are affiliated with the IGD. Their main activities are currently focused on organising and guiding Muslims living in Germany in line with the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. The 'Islamic Culture and Education Centre Berlin e. V.' is regarded as the Berlin meeting place for supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

And in the case of Milli Görüş (p. 104), 'no ideological reorientation is discernible':

"No ideological reorientation is discernible within the Turkish Islamist "Islamic Community Milli Görüş e. V." (IGMG). There have been neither public discussions between reformers and traditionalists nor have any concrete reform projects been initiated. The reformers are apparently unable to assert themselves against the

traditionalists within the organisation. Ongoing close links to Necmettin Erbakan, his party, the 'Saadet Partisi' (SP), and its mouthpiece 'Milli Gazete' ('National Newspaper') demonstrate that the IGMG remains part of the 'Milli Görüş' movement, which continues to propagate Islamist positions. The IGMG's main areas of focus were the recruitment of new members and the strengthening of links with politics and society."

This is not only a problem for Inssan e.V. but also affects its sister organisation, the "Muslim Youth", from which some Inssan board members also hail:

"As board members explain in an interview, the *Muslim Youth in Germany* (MJD) was not recognised as a youth work organisation because it was mentioned in reports by the State Offices for the Protection of the Constitution in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Hesse, as well as by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Following its mention in these reports, the German-speaking organisation – which had also been active in Berlin since 1998 – lost its status as a non-profit association and the associated exemption from income and capital gains tax, and had not regained this status by early 2018. In an interview, the former chair of *Muslim Youth* reports that the Robert Bosch Foundation, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and the Federal Ministry for Youth, which are in principle interested in funding the association's projects, did not see themselves as able to cooperate, either because of the association's monitoring by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution or because the association could not demonstrate its charitable status."⁶

In this regard, it might have made sense for Inssan to publicly distance itself from the Muslim Brotherhood and Milli Görüş, yet the opposite is happening.

2.1. Inssan Festival 2006

On 10 September 2006, INSSAN organised a festival at the Zentraler Festplatz in Berlin-Tegel, featuring a large stage similar to those at pop concerts, a show programme and a bazaar. Around 5,000 spectators attended from all over Germany. The star guests were (1) the famous pop singer *Sami Yusuf*, who sang in Arabic and English but not in German. (2) the well-known MTV presenter and convert *Kristiane Backer*, who had a discreet, three-year love affair in London with a famous, devoutly religious Pakistani Muslim (Imran Khan, then a 'national hero' as a cricketer and currently Prime Minister of Pakistan) and does not wear a headscarf in public (except on the cover of the English edition and the German [paperback edition](#) of her book). The media success and recognition are considerable.

The main sponsor is the organisation 'muslime helfen'; the stage sponsor is 'Safadi-Touristik'; and the bazaar sponsors are 'em2-Kommunikation' (an agency aiming to harness the economic potential of Muslims in Germany), 'MuslimeReisen' and the 'Tahira Restaurant', which advertises itself as 'The Halal Choice'. The following are listed as supporters: IBMus (Initiative of Berlin Muslims / Mosque Communities), IGMG (Islamic Community of Milli Görüş), as well as the IZDB (Intercultural Centre for Dialogue and Education) and the IKEZ (Islamic Cultural and Educational Centre Berlin e.V.), both of which are classified as affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in the 2007 Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution report. Regarding the IKEZ, the report also states (p. 235): 'The "Islamic Cultural and Educational Centre Berlin e.V." (IKEZ) is regarded as a meeting place for Hamas supporters in Berlin.' From 1993 to 2011, the main sponsor, 'muslime helfen e.V.', was chaired by *Ahmad von Denffer*, who maintains close professional and ideological ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and is committed to reshaping German society in accordance with Islamic principles.

Inssan e.V. therefore continues to base its 'umbrella organisation' explicitly and openly on two strong pillars: the German branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and Milli Görüş. (See Appendix 2)

This also occurs in other contexts, as reported by ZDF (2007):

"When ZDF's 'Heute-Journal' produced a feature on the chairman of the IGD, Ibrahim el-Zayat, and broadcast it on 11 July 2007 under the title 'Top Manager of Political Islamism?', el-Zayat – who in the feature did not deny his ideological affinity with the Muslim Brotherhood and described their interpretation of Islam as 'mainstream', led the TV crew to the IZDB and allowed himself to be filmed there. 'In any case, el-Zayat prefers to devote himself to the next generation.

Thanks to his contacts, the young German imam, seen here beside him, was trained in France and Egypt. What kind of Islam did he learn there? Certainly one that corresponds to el-Zayat's ideas', is the commentary accompanying these shots. The young man presented in the report as the 'young German imam' and seen in the picture talking amiably with el-Zayat is Ferid Heider. The reference to his training in France is also significant, as it refers to the IESH, the European Institute for Islamic Studies at Château-Chinon.

It is no coincidence that Ferid Heider is at the IZDB on this particular day. Since the IZDB was founded and its premises on Drontheimer Straße were officially opened in October 2004, there have been numerous joint activities between the IZDB and the sister organisations of the Berlin network, known as the 'Initiative of Berlin Muslims – IBMus', particularly with the associations Muslim Youth in Germany (MJD), INSSAN – for Cultural Interaction e.V. and the Culture and Education Centre (IKEZ) and its youth club Assalam e.V.⁷

Accordingly, the 2007 Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution Report (p. 251) states:

"The organisation with the largest membership in Germany comprising supporters of the 'Muslim Brotherhood' (MB) is the 'Islamic Community in Germany e. V.' (IGD), [...]. The IGD has links to a number of associations. In Berlin, these include the 'Intercultural Centre for Dialogue and Education e. V.' (IZDB), the 'Islamic Culture and Education Centre e. V.' (IKEZ), as well as 'INSSAN for Cultural Interaction e. V.' and the 'Association of Intercultural Centres VIZ e. V.'"

Similarly, in the 2008 Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution report (p. 188):

"Since 2002, the IGD has been led by Ibrahim El-Zayat. He denies being a member of the MB. However, he was described as the 'leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany' by the current leader of the MB, Mohammad Mahdi Akif, in an interview with ARD broadcast on 23 February 2007. When the newspaper 'Die Welt' reported this statement in an article, El-Zayat secured a right of reply. [...] The IGD has links to a number of associations. In Berlin, these include the 'Intercultural Centre for Dialogue and Education e. V.' (IZDB), the 'Islamic Culture and Education Centre e. V.' (IKEZ), as well as 'INSSAN for Cultural Interaction e. V.' and the 'Association of Intercultural Centres VIZ e. V.'"

These statements are repeated word for word in the 2009 VS report. From 2010 onwards, however, Inssan e.V. is no longer mentioned. It simply states (p. 176):

"The IGD has links to a number of associations. In Berlin, these include the 'Intercultural Centre for Dialogue and Education e. V.' (IZDB), the 'Islamic Cultural and Educational Centre e. V.' (IKEZ) and the 'Association of Intercultural Centres e. V.' (VIZ)."

From the 2014 VS report onwards, the coverage of the Muslim Brotherhood and Milli-Görüş becomes significantly shorter and more restrained. The 2014 report states (p. 66):

"Some members of the IGMG in Berlin no longer pursue extremist aims. Overall, a process of change is evident, indicating a gradual breakaway from Erdogan's extremist ideology. Furthermore, internal posts have been filled by reform-minded officials.

This development is taken into account by no longer classifying the IGMG as a whole as extremist, but only those who espouse the extremist 'Millî Görüş' ideology. Consequently, the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution is monitoring those organisations and initiatives whose objectives include the implementation of the 'Millî Görüş' ideology. This reduces the number of individuals in Berlin associated with the IGMG from a former total of 2,900 to the current figure of 500 IGMG members who support the 'Millî Görüş' movement."

Only a brief historical overview of the Muslim Brotherhood is published, followed by the statement (p. 63):

"The organisation with the largest membership of MB supporters in Germany is the 'Islamic Community in Germany e.V.' (IGD), founded in 1960. The IGD has links to a number of associations. In Berlin, these include the 'Intercultural Centre for Dialogue and Education e.V.' (IZDB), the 'Islamic Culture and Education Centre Berlin e.V.' (IKEZ), the 'Neukölln Community Centre e.V.' (NBS), also known as the 'Dar as-Salam Mosque', and the 'Teiba Cultural Centre for the Promotion of Education and Understanding e.V.' (TKZ)."

The 2017 and 2018 Berlin VS reports no longer mention any 'affiliated' organisations.

INSSAN-Festival 2006



10. September 2006 / Zentraler Festplatz Berlin (Tegel) / 4 – 5.000 Besucher

Hauptsponsor:



Bühnensponsor:
Safadi-Touristik



Basarsponsoren:



Unterstützer:



3. Legal as a gateway

What had happened by 2009/2010 to mean that Inssan e.V. was no longer mentioned by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution? Julia Gerlach⁸(2017) cites three reasons for this:

“Soon, however, the association appeared in the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution report. It was linked to the Muslim Brotherhood; the situation is similar for many Arab-influenced organisations and communities in Berlin. This includes, for example, Daras-Salam in Neukölln. What is special about Inssan e.V., however, is that it managed to shake off the stigma of being mentioned in the Office for the Protection of the Constitution’s report. This was achieved through [1] a great deal of persuasion, [2] campaigns – for example, against forced marriage and extremism – and a constant effort to maintain [3] good contacts with politicians.”

Alongside persuasion, campaigns and contacts, another factor became more apparent from 2010/2011 onwards: taking legal action against assessments by the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

Crucial for organisations friendly to Inssan, such as Muslimische Jugend, was the ruling by the Berlin Administrative Court in February 2012: [“The Office for the Protection of the Constitution may only report on Muslimische Jugend to a limited extent.”](#)

“The 2009 Office for the Protection of the Constitution report must be partially revised. This was decided by the Berlin judges on Thursday in response to the legal action brought by Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland e.V.

In principle, the Administrative Court (VG) held that there is a right to report on activities directed against the free democratic basic order. However, this presupposes that the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution can base its findings on verifiable facts. Otherwise, the personal rights of those concerned would preclude such reporting (judgement of 16 February 2012, ref. 1 K 237.10).

The 2009 Report on the Protection of the Constitution states, amongst other things, that a training guide published by Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland e.V. contains certain anti-constitutional statements. Furthermore, the association recommends that its members follow the guidelines of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) in all matters relating to the interpretation of Islamic law.

In the Administrative Court’s view, with regard to some of the statements deemed unconstitutional by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, there is insufficient factual evidence to establish that the association had used them as part of a training guide. Despite corresponding circumstantial evidence, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution had been unable to prove that the material had actually been used.

The same applies to the claim that the association recommends its members to follow the guidelines of the ECFR. It has not been proven with sufficient certainty that such a recommendation was made.

The Working Group of Protestant Youth in Germany e.V. (aej), which has maintained a partnership with the Muslim Youth in Germany e.V. (MJD) since 2000, [is delighted](#).

This ruling has set a high legal hurdle, for what ‘verifiable facts’ can or must be produced? This opens up considerable leeway, which is also being successfully utilised by other Muslim actors.

This lawsuit was preceded in 1998 by another significant ruling (Berlin Higher Administrative Court decision 7 B 4/98), in which the Islamic Federation was recognised as a religious community and permitted to provide religious education largely funded by the state. The education authorities are not permitted to scrutinise the content (freedom of religion), and the boundaries of constitutional compliance are drawn very broadly:

‘The limits on authorisation to provide religious education must be drawn where there is reason to fear that the teachers of the religious community in question may, in these lessons, deviate from the state’s educational objectives either in their entirety or at least with regard to the fundamental principles of the Constitution. This does not preclude religious education teachers from occasionally expressing views that deviate from the constitutional and legal framework on the basis of their religious convictions.’

However, this effectively thwarted the intention to ‘remove’ Koran lessons from mosques, as these very lessons could now, if intended, be taught in state schools.

In the 2016 Berlin Constitutional Protection Report, four organisations – the ‘Intercultural Centre for Dialogue and Education e.V.’ (IZDB), the ‘Islamic Cultural and Educational Centre e.V.’ (IKEZ) and the ‘Teiba Cultural Centre for the Promotion of Education and Understanding e.V.’ (TKZ)) were linked to the Islamic Community of Germany (IGD), and thus to the Muslim Brotherhood. This is significant for Inssan in that Inssan’s managing director, *Mohammad Hajjaj*, is deputy chairman of the Teiba Cultural Centre. The chairman and imam of the Teiba Cultural Centre, *Ferid Heider*, [also publicly displays](#) the ‘R4bia’ salute of the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters.

The following had been written about the fourth organisation, the Neukölln Community Centre (NBS) / Dar-as-Salam Mosque (p. 78, since deleted): ‘The NBS thus operates within a field of tension that is typical of endeavours in the realm of legalistic Islamism.’ This was followed by (p. 78, not deleted):

‘On the one hand, it takes a stand against any use of violence in the name of Islam and is involved in integration and prevention work. On the other hand, it maintains links with the MB. The “Muslim Brotherhood” and organisations affiliated with it in Germany and Europe, such as the FIOE and the FAD, do not reject democracy on principle and are certainly in favour of free elections and the separation of powers. However, they strive to establish a legal practice based on traditional Islamic texts regarded as authentic. In doing so, they call for a form of Islamic law-making that refers to Sharia as the primary source of law – at least for Muslims living in Germany. The free democratic basic order is thus not supported unreservedly; instead, a purely opportunistic stance is adopted towards German law.”

The NBS brought legal action against this sentence (which has since been deleted) and other statements. The case was dismissed by the Berlin Administrative Court on 25 April 2018, as the “links cited in the contested report are based on true factual findings”.⁹ (The property had been purchased by the Islamic Community of Germany (IGD) for 550,000 euros; the NBS pays a symbolic rent of 700 euros per month, and the IGD also uses it for meetings and conferences.) The Neukölln community centre lodged an appeal, and on 23 July 2018 the Berlin Higher Administrative Court ruled that parts of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution’s report for 2016 must be deleted and may not be used in 2017 “until the mention of the applicant with regard to the assessment of its role within the structure of legalistic Islamism has been clarified”. It was not proven on an individual basis that any anti-constitutional activity was being carried out, and a report by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution was “not an activity report but a findings report”, for which “reporting based on suspicion” is inadmissible. The concept of legalistic Islamism was thus legally protected.

These court rulings illustrate very clearly the state of the general relationship between state and church in Germany. The courts rule in accordance with the Constitution and the legal framework established by politicians. The recognition of the Islamic Federation as an association is not subject to state approval. Religious communities (as associations) are free to establish themselves and define themselves as they see fit – that is the essence of religious freedom. The fact that the content of their teaching need not correspond in detail to the legal system should be seen as a concession to the Catholic Church, which, for religious reasons, rejects the equal rights of women to the priesthood, thereby practising gender-based discrimination. In this respect, it is not a failure on the part of the courts, but rather the inaction or lack of interest on the part of politicians in adapting to religious changes and defining more precise limits to religious freedom, insofar as it conflicts with fundamental rights enshrined in the Basic Law. Religious freedom is not a ‘meta-fundamental right’ that takes precedence over all other fundamental rights, but may, where appropriate, compete with other fundamental rights.

In May 2020, I made an enquiry to the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution regarding a background briefing on the topic of ‘legalistic Islamism’ (‘Background briefings fall under “category three”, i.e. they may not be quoted from’) and received a prompt reply:

"[...] Thank you very much for your enquiry and your interest in a background briefing. Unfortunately, due to scheduling constraints, it will not be possible for us to hold a background briefing on the requested topic at our offices in the foreseeable future."

That said, Islamic Relief, the Teiba Cultural Centre, the Muslim Youth of Germany and others are named in a report by the Federal Agency for Civic Education (dated May 2019) on [‘The Muslim Brotherhood in Germany’](#) as part of the Muslim Brotherhood’s network in Germany. Similarly, in April 2019 ([Bundestag Paper 19/9415](#), page 11), the Federal Government cited personnel links.

"To the knowledge of the Federal Government, both ‘Islamic Relief Worldwide’ and ‘Islamic Relief Deutschland e.V.’ have significant personnel links to the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ (MB) or organisations closely associated with it."

4. Religious support

One of the first religious cross-connections was the contact with the Catholic Academy in Berlin, whose Spiritual Rector, *Dr Ernst Pulsfort*, gave a lecture at Inssan in 2004 on the ‘interreligious coexistence’ dialogue and became a member of the Inssan Advisory Board. However, Catholics are in the parliamentary minority in Berlin and tend to be aligned with the CDU, which, however, harboured reservations about the spread of Islam – as was evident in Charlottenburg when a CDU businessman eventually bought up the plot of land on which Inssan had intended to build a cultural centre and mosque.

The dominant religion in Berlin – whilst also in the minority, yet occupying ‘key positions’ of power, such as the chairmanship of the Broadcasting Council of Radio Berlin-Brandenburg and the office of Governing Mayor Michael Müller (= Minister-President) – supports the Protestant Church Congress financially with millions from his ‘private coffers’ (the Berlin Lottery Foundation).

Although the Catholic Bishops’ Conference is also monitoring the situation of Islam in Germany, but in its working paper 172: [‘Christians and Muslims in Germany’](#) (published as early as September 2003), it states: ‘The dynamically growing Islamic structures have not yet reached the heart of our society. Rather, Islam appears to exist alongside German society rather than being integrated into it.’

‘The small proportion of Islamic institutions recognised as independent bodies may come as a surprise. Whatever the reasons for this may be – whether a lack of willingness to accept Islamic institutions as independent bodies, or perhaps an equally lacking willingness to create the conditions necessary for such recognition – the following conclusion is inevitable: the dynamically growing Islamic structures have not yet found their place at the heart of our society. Rather, Islam seems to exist alongside German society rather than being integrated into it.’

In this era of paradigm shift – the Office for the Protection of the Constitution must remain silent – the Protestant Church is taking an active stance and supporting Muslim associations: from 15 to 17 May 2009, a conference is taking place at the Protestant Academy in Loccum entitled [‘Cool Muslims?’](#), (typically Protestant = English; the Catholic Church might perhaps have used the Latin term *‘Musulmani fantastici?’*) with the subtitle: ‘What can and do Muslim youth organisations want to contribute to social development?’ Sponsored by the Dr Buhmann Foundation for the Promotion of Christian-Islamic Understanding. The invitation text states:

‘The potential of young, organised Muslims to help build a pluralistic society is largely underestimated. A diverse landscape of Muslim youth culture has now developed in Germany. Young Muslims should reaffirm their identity and their faith – beyond cultural and national traditions. At the same time, they are socially engaged and wish to play an active role in a society that is still characterised by mistrust of their religion. [...]

Given the wealth of potential offered by committed and well-educated young people involved in these organisations, it is imperative that they be taken seriously as partners in dialogue and cooperation and that they be involved in building a pluralistic society. So far, however, little attention has been paid to the opportunities that may arise through cooperation with Muslim youth organisations at local level or with established youth associations and youth welfare services.

The conference aims to provide a forum for the diverse content and organisational forms of Muslim youth culture in Germany and to explore opportunities for cooperation with other youth organisations, as well as with state and civil society structures.”

In addition to speakers from the Protestant tradition, the following are listed (topic/speaker/organisation), in order of appearance:

- “Yes we can, too!” / *Hischam Abdul Ola* / Executive Board, Muslim Youth in Germany (MJD), Karlsruhe
- “Yes we can, too” / *Mesud Gülbahar* / Federal Youth Executive Committee, Islamic Community Milli Görüs,
- “Action Alliance Against Forced Marriage” / *Lydia Nofal* / Board Member, Inssan e.V., Berlin
- “How and where can interfaith cooperation take place?” / *Hakan Tosuner* / Muslim Youth of Germany, Berlin
- “Looking beyond national borders: Muslim youth work in Austria” / *N.N.* / Muslim Youth in Austria
- “How can Muslim youth organisations be integrated into and supported in social activities in future?” Panel discussion / *Prof. Dr Yasemin Karakasoglu*, Federal Youth Curatorium, Bremen / *Dr Götz Nordbruch*, ufuq, Berlin / *Ralf Harnisch*, Youth Work Division of the BMFSFJ, Bonn / *Hischam Abdul Ola*, Muslim Youth of Germany, Karlsruhe.

Of particular interest was likely to be the representative of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), *Ralf Harnisch*, who, as of 2020, is still head of the department responsible for the Federal Children and Youth Plan ([Department 505](#)).

BMFSFJ, Inssan, Milli Görüs and Muslim Youth in Germany sitting around the same table – that would probably not have been possible in 2007/2008.

The Loccum Academy has not published a conference report on this event, which is very rare, but there is a detailed [newspaper report](#) which states in general terms “that Muslim youth work – like Islamic work as a whole – is almost always carried out on a purely voluntary basis in Germany and that there is a chronic funding problem.” In particular, the discussion centres on the fact that funding applications are also rejected due to monitoring by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

“Tasnim El-Naggar [Muslim Youth of Germany, MJD] from the Berlin Action Alliance against Forced Marriage presented the preventive approach of her initiative, which – unlike other projects against forced marriage, such as those run by various non-Muslim women’s organisations – regards ‘Islam not as a problem, but as a solution’ to this issue, particularly when it comes to prevention. Although her initiative in Berlin is reportedly supported favourably by key authorities, including the Commissioner for Integration and Migration, Mr Piening, and the Senator for the Interior, Mr Körting, the body responsible for allocating funds has refused to grant funding because some of the alliance’s cooperation partners are under surveillance by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. In her presentation on the intercultural opening up of the state youth associations, which has only just begun, Marissa Turac from the Landesjugendring NRW pointed out that the youth associations had hitherto had little to do with migrant and Muslim organisations, even though some of these have been in existence for a long time. One of the key findings of this session was that such institutional networking among the Muslim initiatives and projects presented is still lacking.”

This Loccum conference had been preceded by three other conferences at the Evangelical Academy in Loccum: ‘How far does religious freedom extend? The secular constitutional state and religious pluralism’, 17–19 December 2004, and ‘Between Politics and Religion. In what direction is organised Islam in Germany developing?’, 15–17 April 2005, the conference papers from which were published in the Loccum Proceedings 17/05, whose title is programmatic: ‘Law, Religion, Politics. Towards the Recognition of Islam in Germany’.¹⁰ Among the speakers listed are *Lydia Nofal* (“Experiences and Positions of the Inssan Association for Cultural Interaction e.V.”) and *Prof. Werner Schiffauer* (“From Exile to Diaspora Islam: Muslim Identities in Europe”). *Lydia Nofal*’s brief contribution ¹¹ is essentially limited to the observation: “Relations between German politics and Muslim organisations are mostly confined to a mutual silence.”

This was followed in 2006 by the conference ‘Religions in the City: Opportunities for Urban Coexistence’.¹² Among the speakers were *Barbara Berreßen* (‘Project: Integration of Muslims and Muslim-organisations

in Germany – Aktion Courage e.V.”) – a project of which *Lydia Nofal* is also a [member](#) – as well as *Ismet Misirlioglu* (“The Need for ‘Door-Openers’ for Relations between Muslims and the Majority Society”) from Islamic Relief, who has been a member of the Inssan Advisory Board with voting rights since 2003. *Ismet Misirlioglu*’s very brief contribution was limited to agreeing with the previous speaker, *Barbara Berreßen*. But the essence of conferences lies not in the speeches, but in networking and getting to know one another personally.

The Evangelical Academy in Loccum is part of the Regional Church of Hanover, which is also the ‘home’ of the doyen of Protestant state church law, [Prof. Dr Axel Freiherr von Campenhausen](#). In 2006, von Campenhausen called on [Deutschlandradio](#) for ‘Muslim communities in Germany to assert their rights, just as the churches do. ‘Up to now,’ he said, ‘such attempts have failed because Muslims have consistently failed to organise themselves.’ In this respect, the Loccum conferences can also be understood as part of the ‘midwifery’ of political Islam in Germany.

Also in 2006, a document was published by the EKD: ‘[Clarity and Good Neighbourliness. Christians and Muslims in Germany. A Guide from the Council of the EKD.](#)’ It concludes, under the heading

‘Outlook’, that the Protestant Church will be a good partner to Muslims.

‘The dialogue with Muslims, which the Protestant Church conducts and wishes to foster at the levels described – both from a theological perspective and with regard to issues concerning the lives of Muslims in Germany – is, by its very nature, not intended to be merely temporary. It is a process of dialogue through which the Evangelical Church consistently demonstrates how important mutual information-sharing, intellectual exchange, joint consultation on cases of conflict, and concerted action on religious and social issues are for Muslims to lead a good life in Germany. Muslims are not left to their own devices when the practice of their religion, the preservation of their culture and the manifold challenges of social integration cause concern for them and for society as a whole. They can see the Protestant Church as a partner which endeavours, to the best of its knowledge and belief, to do them justice and to advocate for their respect and recognition. They can be assured – and should realise – that this commitment to them cannot be shaken, even by critical questions posed to them from within the Protestant Church. The principle stated at the outset remains valid: there is no alternative to a process of dialogue that allows mutual understanding, respectful interaction and good neighbourliness to grow and flourish. All thinking and striving that creates violence, hostility and hatred between Christianity and Islam must finally be consigned to the past. The Protestant Church and Muslims in Germany can send important signals to the whole world – where this past, unfortunately, keeps resurfacing – in this regard. Together, they can make a significant contribution to healing the wounds of the past.”

One of the key authors of this EKD guidance document is Johannes Kandel, Director of the Academy at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Berlin, which once again highlights the cooperation between the EKD and the SPD. The Chairperson and Managing Director of Inssan are also members of the Berlin SPD.

5. Consolidation and academic flank protection

Networking had progressed, and the link with the Open Society Institute of billionaire George Soros’s Open Society Foundation was evident not only in the fact that the Open Society Foundation is officially named as a ‘supporter’ that provides ‘structural funding’ to Inssan – meaning primarily for networking activities – but also in the publication (2010) of a study funded by the Open Society Institute, ‘Muslims in Berlin’ (in German and English). The link to the Open Society Foundation lies in its mission statement:

‘A central concern of the Open Society Institute (OSI) is the equality and equal opportunities of all people in an open society. The aim of the OSI’s work is, on the one hand, to reduce discrimination, in particular the harm suffered by minorities as a result of discriminatory treatment. A further aim is to ensure equal opportunities for all through their inclusion in government programmes for social integration.’

The fieldwork and interviews for *Muslims in Berlin* took place in 2008 and 2009, and the lead researcher and author is *Nina Mühe*, an ethnologist and research assistant at the Chair of Cultural Studies held by *Prof. Dr Werner Schiffauer* at the European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder, to whom explicit thanks are given in the foreword.

“Prof. Schiffauer supported the OSI study in Berlin Kreuzberg throughout the entire research period; he contributed to the background report on Germany and shared his experience and knowledge of Muslims in Germany right up to the report’s publication. His support was invaluable.”

Significant parts of the report are based on interviews with, amongst others, the politicians *Prof. Dr Barbara John*, Berlin’s first Commissioner for Integration from 1981 to 2003 (CDU), Berlin; and *Günter Piening*, Commissioner for Integration and Migration in Berlin since 2003, Senate Department for Integration, Labour and Social Affairs, Berlin.

The interviewees representing Muslim organisations were:

- *Burhan Kesici*, Secretary-General of the Islamic Council of the Federal Republic of Germany and Deputy Chair of the Islamic Federation of Berlin, Berlin
- *Imran Sagir*, Chair of the local organisation Inssan e.V. and board member of DMK (German-speaking Muslim Circle), Berlin
- *Lydia Nofal*, board member of Inssan e.V.
- *Hakan Tosuner*, board member of the Muslim youth organisation MJD (Muslim Youth Germany), Berlin
- *Meho Travljanin*, Bosnian Islamic Cultural Centre, Berlin
- *Abdul Razzaque*, member of IBMUS and the Urdu-speaking Bilal Mosque Association, school mediator in Charlottenburg, Berlin

Given these sources, it is hardly surprising that Inssan e.V. and its supporters are well represented in this report. For example, it states:

“At the level of the city administration, Berlin established the *Islam Forum* in 2005, which four times a year gives representatives of most Muslim associations the opportunity to meet with official political representatives, such as the Senator for the Interior or the Commissioner for Integration, and even representatives of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. According to the views of both the Muslim participants and the political representatives taking part in the forum, it has already contributed significantly to mutual understanding and trust.

Inssan has the impression that these contacts may have helped local politicians to champion their mosque-building project in Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, even though both the project and the organisation had, at times, faced considerable opposition from some politicians and in the local media. The Senator for the Interior had even written an official letter to the Charlottenburg district administration, in which he confirmed that *Inssan* was promoting the integration of Muslim residents and should therefore be supported. This letter represented a significant political step, as Inssan had previously been under observation by the *Office for the Protection of the Constitution*.”

Inssan is also given a voice on the question of whether Muslim organisations are at all representatives of Muslims in Germany (p. 143):

“A recent survey by the *Islam Conference* on Muslims in Germany appears to support the claim that Muslim organisations do not represent the majority of Muslims living in Germany. It states that fewer than a third of those surveyed felt represented by the organisations about which they were asked. However, these findings are disputed by interviewees such as Lydia Nofal from Inssan. She describes this as systematic misrepresentation and distortion designed to support the political rejection and refusal to *grant corporate status* to Muslim organisations, as the study’s participants were only asked about specific umbrella organisations. Some of these umbrella organisations are scarcely known amongst the respondents, whilst other, well-known organisations such as the Islamic Community Milli Görüs (IGMG) were not even mentioned directly in the survey. The reason given for this was that they are not direct members of the *Islamic Conference*. Federal Office for Migration, *Muslim Life*, p. 179.”

On the one hand, these political contacts play a role in the fact that Inssan e. V. was no longer mentioned by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution and does not have to take the matter to court. A special

role is also played by the aforementioned ethnologist and cultural studies scholar, *Prof. Dr Werner Schiffauer*.

Werner Schiffauer is, or rather was, one of the most influential researchers on Islam in Germany. Not only was he Chair of the Council for Migration (an association of around 170 migration researchers), but the research staff at his chair included not only the aforementioned *Dr Nina Mühe* – for whom he is the doctoral supervisor and who has been project coordinator of the CLAIM conference since 2017 – but also, to give just a second example, *Hakan Tosuner*, managing director of the ‘Avicenna-Studienwerk’ (a scheme to support gifted students) for Muslims, founded in 2013, who was an active member of the Muslim Youth in Berlin and the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations ([FEMYSO](#)) in Brussels for several years.

Schiffauer made his position clear to the public relatively early on in [the 2006 Migration Report](#):

‘As co-editor of the Migration Report, which is published every two years, Schiffauer analyses the effects of preventive security policy on Muslims. Alongside clearly extremist groups (‘Caliphate State’), organisations such as the Islamic Community of Germany and Milli Görüş are also under observation by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, although the migration researcher believes that a change of direction has taken place within these organisations. According to their own statements, they are committed to the Basic Law and distance themselves from violence. It would be necessary to objectively verify this claim. Instead, information is presented in a highly selective manner in the published reports by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Schiffauer criticises. For instance, these communities’ attempts to promote Islamic self-confidence through youth work are condemned as anti-integrationist. Yet when, at the same time, these very same communities encourage parents to send their children to German secondary schools, this is not considered in the reports. Contradictory statements are not interpreted as reflecting internal debates but are denounced as double-dealing. In Schiffauer’s view, this reflects the pressure to demonstrate, at the very moment an organisation is included in the Office for the Protection of the Constitution’s report, that this inclusion is justified.”

Werner Schiffauer then published a controversial study in 2008: ‘[The Millî Görüş Islamic Community](#)’. The general tone, as set out in the introduction, is:

“The Millî Görüş Islamic Community is one of the most controversial communities of Turkish Islam in Germany. The reports of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution paint a picture of a tightly organised community whose immediate aim is the establishment of a theocracy in Turkey and whose long-term aim is Islamic world domination. In the meantime, the aim is to establish ‘parallel societal structures’ in which the kingdom of God is to be anticipated. A socio-historical analysis of the community paints a different picture, namely that of a transnational community of migrant workers whose relations with German society, with the Turkish migrant community and with their country of origin have undergone a complex history.”

His main thesis is that a group of reformers has since emerged, and that Millî Görüş is undergoing a development similar to that of the radical German student movement (to which *Schiffauer* also counts himself as belonging), whose members have since all become quite law-abiding citizens. His concluding observation is:

“As regards the further institutional development of the Millî Görüş community, two scenarios are conceivable: The first scenario is that the reformers succeed in their attempt to formulate a value-conservative programme within society. This would offer the chance to overcome the Islamist positions that still exist from within. It would also offer the possibility of harnessing the community’s considerable potential for self-organisation and mobilisation of the faithful to facilitate integration into society. The second scenario is that the reformers fail: this would mean that the community would break apart. The more educated sections would leave it and either withdraw in resignation or become radicalised. The remaining community would probably withdraw and become insular. The considerable pressure currently being exerted on Millî Görüş by politicians is working in favour of the second scenario. The reformers within the community are currently having the ground pulled from under their feet – and those in the community who already believe that opening up to society does not pay off feel vindicated.”

Werner Schiffauer later explicitly refers to this 'protective hand' in his paper presented at a conference organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on 'Recommendations for Action in Addressing Islamist Extremism and Islamophobia', entitled '[Security Knowledge and Deradicalisation](#)'.

In this text, he examines the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and its assessments. Whilst he concedes that the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, in relation to its function (gathering information for political decision-making), proceeds and assesses matters correctly in 'categorical' terms, he puts it in its place, as these categorical classifications fail to take account of the reality of life within the organisations and cannot capture their vitality and complexity. Only academics (such as himself) can do this, and he calls on politicians to free themselves from the recommendations of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (p. 241):

"This concerns [...] the political and social bodies that lead the dialogue and underpin deradicalisation work. Ultimately, they are called upon to deal with the information produced by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution with greater self-assurance than before. In doing so, they would ultimately be making use of this information in the way that was originally intended. To this end, it would be more than helpful if the Office for the Protection of the Constitution itself were to clarify the limits of the intelligence it produces and abandon the reticence it has shown in this regard to date."

Inssan e.V. is specifically named as one of the examples of victims of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (pp. 238–239)

"This is by no means the only instance of rejection of which I am aware. In an email I have received from Peter Amsler to Lydia Nofal of INSSAN dated 26 October 2006, it is stated that a planned event at the Catholic Academy would have to be cancelled due to a lack of funding from the Federal Ministry of the Interior if INSSAN were to insist on the planned invitation:

'Yesterday, Mr [...] from the Federal Ministry of the Interior rang us and informed us that there would be no obstacle to funding the event, provided we were prepared to remove INSSAN from the programme. INSSAN is regarded by the BMI as an Islamist organisation, meaning that the BMI cannot fund an event in which it participates; otherwise, the Ministry's policy would not be consistent. Mr [...] asked for our understanding and said that this was the Ministry's policy. In this regard, he apologised for only getting in touch about this now, after he had consulted further.' This passage is interesting because it clearly demonstrates the binding power that categorical knowledge produces. It is transformed into an institution's policy, to which even civil servants who personally assess the situation differently are bound. Other projects rejected for the same reasons were 'Dialogistan – Young People for Human Rights', in which INSSAN was approached in 2007 by the Berlin Centre for Development Policy Education and Information (EPIZ) to cooperate, and the 'Youth Against Violence' project, in which the Education and Intercultural Centre in Goslar, affiliated with the IGMG, had proposed a collaborative project with the police to combat everyday violence. These rejections are also noteworthy because they demonstrate the suppression of information that does not fit the narrative."

This 'backing' achieved the desired result, and public funding applications were no longer rejected.

In June 2014, Schiffauer reiterated his position in '[Muslims in Germany: The Office for the Protection of the Constitution as a Brake on Reform](#)' and spoke of 'ideological snooping':

"The second generation brought together what seemed to be irreconcilable elements: namely, an orientation towards a law-based Islam and the Basic Law. Their post-Islamist quest leads to an intellectually convincing response to radical Islamism and its opposition between the West and Islam.

Within the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, there were repeatedly staff members who drew attention to these developments. They were thwarted for political reasons. In reports for external consumption, the prevailing view was that these developments were merely a façade concealing the Islamist orientation that still actually existed. [...]

German society paid a high price for the bureaucracy's sluggishness. Yet the costs of surveillance were the smallest part of it. The political costs were far higher. The Office for the Protection of the Constitution's suspicion meant that the reform efforts of the second generation were repeatedly thwarted. Numerous promising projects were thwarted. One pinnacle of absurdity, for example, was that the Ministry for Family Affairs refused to fund the

‘Isl’amour: Muslims Against Forced Marriage’ because Muslim Youth and Milli Görüs were involved – in other words, precisely those conservative communities that are otherwise always criticised for their view of the family. This served to reinforce the views of precisely those within Muslim organisations who rejected such initiatives for greater openness in the first place.[...]

Monitoring groups that do not engage in violence and do not call for the overthrow of the constitution amounts to ideological snooping. The Office for the Protection of the Constitution likes to see itself as a ‘constitutional MOT’ – but it is far too dependent on politics to be able to fulfil this role. If there is any desire to retain the office at all, it should concentrate on monitoring extremists prepared to use violence.”

In 2013, *Prof. Werner Schiffauer* – again with financial support from the Open Society Foundation as part of the University of Oxford’s Network Turkey – contributed extensively to a publication: ‘[Signals from the Majority Society](#)’, in which the Office for the Protection of the Constitution is portrayed in detail as an obstacle to integration.

Prof. Werner Schiffauer’s influence extends to the point where he – as a member of the advisory board of the Berliner Sparkasse’s Brandenburg Gate Foundation from 2008 to 2015 – [provided expert justification](#) for, initiated and ensured that not only mosque associations but also the IGMG (Islamic Community Milli Görüs) and Inssan e.V. became local project partners for the foundation’s ‘Brücken im Kiez’ project. In 2015, the foundation decided to end its collaboration with the mosque associations. The IGMG and Inssan e.V. continue to be [listed as partners](#).

These are just a few examples of the ‘backing’ provided by academic standing. The list of such examples could be extended at will:

- For instance, *Prof. Werner Schiffauer* (together with *Prof. Iman Attia* of Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, and *Daniel Bax*, *Die Tageszeitung*, and *Lydia Nofal*, Inssan e.V., amongst others) is a member [of the CLAIM Alliance’s expert panel](#).
- 2013: ‘... like in the film? [Muslim diversity in Berlin](#)’, films and discussions, 2 March 2013: Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum, panel discussion: Moderator: *Ferda Ataman* (Mediendienst Integration), *Samir Nasr* (director), *Lydia Nofal* (Chair of INSSAN e.V.), *Werner Schiffauer* (Professor of Comparative Cultural and Social Anthropology, European University Viadrina)
- 2016: At the INSSAN symposium ‘[Muslims are doing it!](#)’ (23 November 2016), *Prof. Schiffauer*, together with *Fidel Barthold*, presented the findings of the research project ‘This is how we’ll manage it’.
- 2017: [Berlin against Nazis](#): Conference ‘Attribution and Devaluation – Jointly Countering Discrimination against Muslim People’. (Speakers on 5 April 2017 included *Werner Schiffauer*, *Lydia Nofal* and *Zeynep Cetin*, Inssan, and *Batz*, taz).
- 2017: Joint conference organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Muslim Avicenna Studienwerk ‘[Democracy under pressure?](#)’ (19–21 May 2017). Speakers included *Prof. Werner Schiffauer* (Chair of the Council on Migration) and Ms *Lydia Nofal* (Chair of Inssan e.V.)
- 2018: *Professor Dr Werner Schiffauer* is a visiting [Mercator Senior Fellow](#) at the Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies for nine months (following his retirement). During his stay, he conducts research on the project “The Islam Policy of the German Ministries of the Interior – A Contribution to the Anthropology of State Apparatus”.
- 2019: Schiffauer, together with Inssan and others, signs an [open letter](#) as part of the CLAIM Alliance calling for a commission of experts on ‘anti-Muslim racism’. (19 June 2019)
- 2019: Open petition calling for a [Commissioner against Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment](#). (28 December 2019: Amended text) Signatories include *Werner Schiffauer* and *Nina Mühe*.
- 2020: Participant [in the](#) closed [symposium at the Evangelical Academy Berlin](#) (together with, amongst others, *Lydia Nofal* and Inssan e.V.) entitled ‘Internal Security and Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Challenges, Experiences, Future Prospects’. 14 February 2020

6. Inssan Projects

Nothing has yet been published anywhere regarding the finances, i.e. the funding of Inssan e.V. itself. The rookie mistake made in the two attempted large-scale projects – the cultural centres and mosque constructions – of relying publicly on local donations and substantial grants from the Gulf states was not repeated. In this respect, Inssan is virtually invisible as an association and is only visible through its projects.

Once the obstacles posed by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution had been removed in 2009/2010, the projects were able to begin – with state funding.

Inssan provides differing information regarding the start of its project work. The page for the ‘Wegweiser’ project [states](#): “The project is run by the non-profit association Inssan (meaning ‘human’ in Arabic), which has been carrying out projects in Berlin since 2001 with the aim of positively shaping community life in our city.” And the ‘2018 Annual Report’ states, as does the website: ‘Active in social work since 2002’. However, the association was not entered in the register of associations until January 2003, and the first project was not implemented until 2010.

Various elements form the basis of the projects. On the one hand, there are intra-Muslim issues involving young people whom the state, due to cultural and religious influences, can no longer reach through schools in an inclusive manner; here, a Muslim project with a more modern approach steps in, acting as a ‘social worker’ and offering ‘prevention against radicalisation’ in place of the mosques.

On the other hand, there is a well-known principle: ‘Pars pro toto’ (a part stands – by way of representation – for the whole). It is used in a wide variety of contexts, be it British fishing rights in the Brexit negotiations or cases of discrimination against Muslims: a phenomenon that does exist but is – in terms of numbers – marginal is centralised and, through propaganda, emotionally charged as ‘typical of the whole’ (e.g. the headscarf debate) and, in a first step, organised as ‘discrimination against Muslims’; in a second step, there is then a show of solidarity with other organisations that also promote this cause, and a broader ‘Committee Against Racism’ is formed, which, through the participation of the Jewish community, frees itself from accusations of anti-Semitism levelled at Islamist groups previously observed to be involved in such activities. (What is also astonishing here is that the term ‘race’—which one had believed had been overcome in liberal Germany—is being revived in ‘racism’, and that those who use this term implicitly regard themselves as a ‘race’, which is, however, more than surprising in the case of Muslims.) And thirdly, Inssan and affiliated Muslim organisations enjoy the support of the major Christian churches, particularly the Protestant Church, which are actively and organisationally prepared to bring Muslim organisations on board the ‘religious boat’.

6.1. The Network Against Discrimination and Islamophobia (as [described by Inssan](#))

“[...] was founded in August 2010 to actively combat discrimination against Muslim women and men in our society.

The project takes an empowerment-based approach. The aim is to raise awareness amongst those affected that they are citizens of this country with equal rights, and to show them what action they can take in the event of discrimination.

We visit mosques and Muslim organisations. Drawing on the experiences of the participants, we provide information at these on-site events about the legal framework, highlight options for action and provide details of the existing support and advisory services.”

The Berlin Senate describes the project ([Parliamentary Paper 18/16 203](#)) in similar terms, but with a specific justification of “promoting self-determination and social participation”:

“The funded project ‘Network against Discrimination and Islamophobia’ (project name until 2013:

‘Network against Discrimination against Muslims’) trains activists in various mosque communities on issues of discrimination and the current legal situation under the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG), and supports their networking and mutual support. In addition, it provides initial (legal) advice to victims of discrimination and, where necessary, refers them to specialist advisory services. The project provides information on discrimination against Muslims and on the legal framework, whilst also advising and empowering those affected. It therefore also helps to increase trust in the rule of law and promotes self-determination and social participation.”

However, this awareness-raising work faces a certain dilemma stemming from the lack of awareness among those affected, as reported by the anthropologist *Esra Özyürek* following discussions with activists in Berlin:¹³

“In my view, migrant Muslims – particularly practising Muslims – are less likely to take such decisive action because they already feel marginalised and alienated. They expect so little from the majority society that they do not usually perceive injustices as something that could be changed or eliminated. The experiences of a team that runs seminars in mosques to raise awareness of discrimination illustrate this very clearly. Lydia Nofal, chair of Inssan and a convert, reported during a presentation of the ‘Training against Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Xenophobia’: ‘When we go into mosques and ask people whether they feel socially discriminated against, they often say: “No, we don’t.” And when we then explain to them how discrimination works, they say: ‘Oh, if *that’s what* you mean, of course – it happens to us all the time!’ *Safter Çinar*, a member of the executive board of the Turkish Federation in Berlin, made similar comments when we discussed his organisation’s anti-discrimination work.”

In 2019, Walter Otte, spokesperson for the Berlin State Working Group of Secular Greens, also identified a specific ‘victim mentality’ in [an interview](#) with Inssan:

“Inssan e. V. is an anti-discrimination organisation that is co-funded by the State Office for Equality, which operates under the jurisdiction of the Senator for Justice – and has been since before Senator Behrendt took office, incidentally. For years on end, they have been pursuing a line of discrimination whenever people with a migrant background are concerned. The individuals and organisations affected generally see themselves as victims and present themselves as such. This is a ploy that has – so far, at least – been successful, and a significant proportion of the left-liberal crowd are taken in by it, seeing discrimination where none exists. It would be interesting to examine this multiculturalist position to see how closely it aligns with far-right ethnopluralism. In any case, the Neutrality Act is not a ‘headscarf ban’; the women in question are free to wear a headscarf outside school, whenever and wherever they wish.

In 2020, the claim remains undeterred: ‘Attacks on Muslims are [significantly more unrestrained in their intensity](#)’.

‘The Network Against Discrimination and Islamophobia (Inssan e.V.) has recorded 265 incidents for 2019, reflecting an alarming situation in Berlin. Compared with 2018, this represents an increase of 88 incidents. [...]

Inssan e.V. is calling on Berlin’s political leaders to expand the counselling and documentation centre and to ensure secure funding for the counselling work, which is often carried out on a voluntary basis. We expressly welcome the plan by the Berlin State Office for Equal Treatment and Against Discrimination to fund a project on the topic of ‘complaints mechanisms and empowerment against anti-Muslim racism’.

Zeynep Çetin: Project coordination for the Network against Discrimination and Islamophobia/Inssan e.V. is funded at a rate of 28 hours per week. ([Parliamentary Paper 18/15 795](#))

However, these figures should be treated with caution. Reasons: (1) According to [estimates on religions in Berlin](#), there are around 220,000–300,000 Muslims living in [Berlin](#). Of the 265 incidents reported by Inssan, 225 were motivated by religious reasons, as stated further on in the Inssan report. However, this represents – which is difficult enough for the individuals concerned – only 0.1 to 0.08 per cent of Muslims in Berlin. (2) The reported incidents vary greatly in nature, ranging from ‘insults and hostility to physical assaults’. (3) The subjective experience and actual situation of those affected is therefore difficult to ascertain. (4) The more questions one asks – the online reporting system was introduced for the first time in 2019 – the more responses one will receive; in other words, does the rise in reports (2016: 110, 2017: 115, 2018: 176, 2019: 265) actually due to an increase in incidents, or to an expansion of reporting options? If that is the case, these would be elements of (in the truest sense of the word) opinion-making.

In general, the data on discrimination in Germany is very sparse, and according to the [Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency](#), discrimination on the grounds of religion was not a primary ground for discrimination in 2019 either.

“The number of enquiries regarding discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin or racist attributions rose by just under ten per cent in 2019 to 1,176 cases, or 33 per cent of all enquiries received by the independent Anti-Discrimination Agency. [...] In addition to discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin, the enquiries are distributed across the other grounds of discrimination protected under the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) as follows: 29 per cent of complaints concerned discrimination on the grounds of gender. This was followed by discrimination on the grounds of disability (26 per cent), age (12 per cent), religion (7 per cent), sexual identity (4 per cent) and belief (2 per cent). The largest proportion of reported discrimination occurs in the workplace:

in 2019, 36 per cent of enquiries related to discrimination at work or when looking for a job. The second most common category (26 per cent) concerned discrimination in everyday life, such as when looking for accommodation, shopping, in restaurants, or when dealing with insurance and banking matters.”

The project was funded “initially for two years, with one-third of the funding provided by the London-based *Open Society Foundations* (OSF), founded by the fund manager and philanthropist Georges Soros, and two-thirds from the Berlin Senate’s budget. Since 2015, the network has been co-funded by the *State Office for Equal Treatment – Against Discrimination*, part of the Senate Department for Justice, Consumer Protection and Anti-Discrimination.”¹⁴ More detailed figures can occasionally be found in questions raised in the Berlin House of Representatives, such as in [printed paper 18/15 483](#).

The Open Society Foundation contributed 38,000 euros in 2011, 29,622.21 euros in 2012 and 32,472.90 euros in 2013. In 2015, according to [parliamentary question 18/15 795](#), the figure was 100,000 US dollars. The Berlin Senate allocated (according to [printed paper 18/13 944](#)), as part of the state programme ‘Democracy. Diversity. Respect. Against right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism’, the following amounts in the years 2010: €26,799 / 2011: €22,509 / 2012: 34,210 / 2013: 32,915 / 2014: 35,756 / 2015: 45,461 / 2016: 54,081 / 2017: 60,879 / 2018: 78,729. (Some of the figures have been corrected based on the information in the [grant database](#).)

For the sake of completeness, and also to elaborate on the opening remark that the topic of Islam is ‘treacherous ground’, it should be noted that during the same period (summer 2010) when the Inssan Network was founded, the Berlin GEW (Education and Science Union) held a workshop which addressed (according to [the FAZ: ‘The poison of Muslim intolerance’](#)) dealt with the ‘conflict, smouldering for years, of rampant, often violent intolerance in schools with a high proportion of pupils of Muslim origin’. This workshop was based on an article in the ‘Berliner Lehrerzeitung’ from 2009. The report is entitled: “Anti-German sentiment in schools – On the causes of a growing trend among young people of Turkish and Arab origin” and can [no longer be found](#).

The FAZ report describes a teacher’s experience of how the issue is “played down”:

“Secondary school teacher Wolfgang Schenk, for example, formerly a spokesperson for the Alternative List, has had first-hand experience of how the trade union and school authorities played down his concerns whenever he raised issues such as misogynistic attacks on female teachers or insults such as ‘Nazi’, ‘sluts’, ‘racist’ or the threat of a forced marriage involving a female pupil. He was told to keep a low profile so as not to give the far right any ammunition. This relentless ignorance persists to this day. As early as the early 1990s, the influence of Islamic organisations and certain mosque associations had become apparent, whose anti-Western, anti-democratic resentments were by then increasingly successfully poisoning the atmosphere in many schools, says Schenk. ‘Anti-German sentiment’ is in fact just one of many forms of exclusion.”

The GEW itself, at its state delegates’ assembly a month later (2–3 November 2010), [declared in a spirit of solidarity and resolved](#) that it condemns ‘growing anti-Muslim racism’ and rejects the concept of hostility towards Germans:

“The GEW BERLIN

- condemns the growing anti-Muslim racism.
- advocates for both positive and negative freedom of religion, as guaranteed by the Basic Law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- rejects the use of the term ‘hostility towards Germans’, which was invented by right-wing populists as a battle cry against the term ‘xenophobia’ and which demagogically distorts social reality.”

This established yet another protective shield: anyone who reports on integration problems linked to Islam is a demagogic ‘right-wing populist’.

6.2. Guide: Mentors for Refugees (early 2016)

“[...] is a project that actively shapes the work of volunteers with refugees. The mentoring programme was developed to inspire young adults (aged 17 to 30) with a migrant background to engage in civic work for refugees and to support them in this endeavour.

The mentors in the project undergo training (1 workshop and monthly coaching sessions) to prepare them for their tasks and build their confidence. Together with refugees from facilities (such as emergency accommodation and residential homes for unaccompanied minor refugees (UMF)), the mentors plan and carry out activities designed to benefit all residents of the facilities.”

Figures on the number of people trained are rarely quoted. From early 2015 to late 2016 (according to the Wegweiser Annual Report 2016), approximately 30 volunteers completed the mentoring training. The project is led by Natalia Amina Loinaz.

The project partners are two organisations with which the Chair of the Board has personal links to Inssan (the ZDM (Central Council of Muslims) and the JUMA project run by the RAA Berlin), as well as the Robert Bosch Foundation. The project is [funded and supported](#), on the one hand, by the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband through the programme ‘Coordination, Training and Promotion of Voluntary Work for Refugees’ run by the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, and, on the other hand, by the ‘Participation and Integration Programme’ (PartInt) run by the Berlin Senate Commissioner for Integration and Migration.

The ‘[Final Report](#) on Programme Dialogue’ lists the following figures for this Inssan project: 2016: €42,129 and for 2017: €42,129. The Berlin Senate also funded the project (according to [Parliamentary Paper 18/13 944](#)) with: 2016: 53,263.40 / 2017: 53,263.40 / 2018: 55,000 / 2019: 55,000.

According to [Bundestag printed paper 18/13658](#), a sum of 95,947 euros was paid out from the ‘Demokratie leben!’ programme (2018).

6.3. ASMA “Active Empowerment of Muslim Actors” (2016/2017, 2020–2021)

“[...] comprises a leadership programme for Muslim stakeholders and open forums for exchange and professional development, such as the network of Muslim stakeholders in social and community work, which has been in place since 2016 as part of the Wegweiser project. We aim to build on the insights gained from our work in the new ASMA project and ensure a lasting impact within Muslim organisations through the training of community leaders. By promoting organised and sustainable engagement, we strengthen the stakeholders and, in turn, their organisations.”

Training courses: New Media Makers (*Daniel Bax*, et al.), Funding: House of Resources.

6.4. “Muslims Are Doing It – Network of Muslim Stakeholders in Integration”. (2017)

This sub-project was part of the ‘Wegweiser’ project: The House of Resources writes:

“The aim of the ‘Muslims Are Doing It’ project was to highlight the significant commitment of Muslim organisations to working with refugees by professionalising the public relations work of a network of Muslim organisations in Berlin. To this end, a training course was held on writing newsletters and designing a joint newsletter, which was published for the first time in November 2017. In addition to Inssan, Islamic Relief, the Central Council of Muslims in Germany and JUMA (Young, Muslim, Active) are also involved in the joint newsletter.”

Funding provided by the House of Resources (HoR). Since 2016, the project has received funding from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community. Since 2019 (until 2022), it has been funded by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Its main remit is to provide financial support to smaller NGOs.

6.5. “Not Without My Faith”. (2017–2019)

“For us at Inssan e.V., combating discrimination and racism has been a priority for many years. With our new project, we will tackle this same task using a broader range of tools. The aim is both to raise awareness amongst the majority society and to empower Muslim communities.” The project manager was May Zeidani Yufanyi.

According to [Bundestag Paper 19/1012](#), a sum of 101,709.76 euros was approved for 2017 under the programme “Living Democracy – Active against Right-wing Extremism, Violence and Misanthropy / Sub-area: Racism and Racial Discrimination”.

The project partner is the [Jewish Museum Berlin](#), which, together with Inssan, is hosting an event at the W. Michael Blumenthal Academy on 23 May 2017.

Keynote speech: *Ozan Keskinliç*, Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin. Panel discussion: *Eren Ünsal*, Director of the Berlin State Office for Equal Treatment – Against Discrimination (LADS); *Dr Aleksandra Lewicki*, Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies, Freie Universität Berlin; *Daniel Bax*, Head of the Migration and Integration Section at the *taz*; *Mohamad Hajjaj*, Managing Director of Inssan e.V.; Moderator: *Zeynep Çetin*, Head of the Network against Discrimination and Islamophobia at Inssan e.V.

This is just one of several collaborations between the Muslim association Inssan and Jewish organisations, whether it be the ‘Rabbis versus Imams’ football matches or the joint cycling events involving rabbis and imams (‘Meet2respect’), amongst others.

Prof. Bassam Tibi, an immigrant from Syria and a liberal Muslim, issues a very urgent warning against such collaborations:¹⁵

‘Islamists use propaganda to equate anti-Islamism with anti-Semitism. Ignatz Bubis, to whom I was very close, once wrote to me seeking advice after Islamists had approached him in an attempt to win him over to the formation of a Jewish-Islamic alliance. The astute Bubis was less naive than many of his fellow citizens and had a colleague carry out some research, who promptly discovered the name of that group in the annual report of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Bubis could no longer make sense of the world and asked me, as a liberal Muslim and dialogue partner, for clarification. I explained to him how the Islamists exploit Europe as a hinterland and misuse Islamic immigration for their own ends, and how they also seek to use the Jewish community to their advantage through a sham alliance. They can achieve this if they succeed in establishing the false parallel between anti-Semitism and anti-Islamism.

Anticipating the equating of anti-Semitism with anti-Islamism, I advised Bubis to refrain from supporting the Islamists, and he followed this advice. For if the Islamists were to succeed in forming such a coalition, then no one would be able to say a single word against them, and no authority in Europe would be able to take action against them.”

The psychologist and author Ahmad Mansour also warns, with regard to “Meet2respect” (a joint cycle ride by rabbis and imams), of the danger of [being exploited](#):

“‘The Jewish community must not be so naïve as to allow itself to be exploited by such initiatives.’ The warning was prompted by the participation of Mohamed Taha Sabri, the imam of the Neukölln Meeting Centre (NBS), and Khaled al-Seddiq, the imam of the Intercultural Centre for Dialogue and Education e. V. (IZDB), in the tandem ride. Both mosques are mentioned in the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution’s report due to their links to the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. Last year, a photograph was made public showing Sabri holding up his right hand with his fingers outstretched and his thumb tucked in. Since the massacre of Muslim Brotherhood members outside the Rabi’a al-Adawiya Mosque in Cairo on 14 August 2013, this so-called Rabia gesture has been regarded as a symbol of the Muslim Brotherhood.”

6.6. “Ummah Intersectional” (2018)

“A project by Inssan e.V., the aim of which is to provide a space for the life experiences of Muslim LGBTQ*I people, both in the form of a safe(r) space and through addressing these issues within Muslim communities. It was launched in the hope of providing temporal, spatial, personnel and financial support to an empowering community as it takes shape – a community that can continue to exist independently, without the project’s support, and which has not yet been found in Berlin in this form.” Meetings take place once a month.

6.7. ‘Manara – Leuchtturm’ (2019 onwards)

“The project focuses on training peer educators on the topics of displacement, migration and the culture of remembrance, with the aim of promoting and strengthening young adults’ understanding of the rule of law and democracy, particularly those with experience of displacement or a migrant background. Drawing on their own life experiences and contexts, participants engage intensively with the key themes of Nazism, anti-Semitism, anti-discrimination and the culture of remembrance, and are expected to pass on the knowledge they have acquired as independent, trained multipliers within their communities.”

Funding is provided by the 2018 ‘Migration and Culture of Remembrance’ funding programme of the EVZ Foundation – Remembrance, Responsibility and Future.

What all these projects have in common is that they are entirely dependent on public funding, and Inssan has not yet been able to build up its own capital.

Funding for Inssan projects (2010–2018) *)										
Project	Funding body	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Network Against Discrimination	OSI **)		38,000	29,622	32,473		100,000 \$			
	Berlin	26,799	22,509	34,210	32,915	35,756	45,461	54,081	60,879	78,729
Guide	Federal							42,129	42,129	95,947
	Berlin							53,263	53,263	55,000
NoG **)	Berlin								101,710	
<i>Total</i>		<i>26,799</i>	<i>60,509</i>	<i>63,832</i>	<i>65,388</i>	<i>35,756</i>	<i>(145,000)</i>	<i>149,473</i>	<i>257,981</i>	<i>229,676</i>
*) This overview is not intended to be exhaustive. Inssan e.V. has not provided any figures in this regard. For the Inssan project ASMA 'Active Empowerment of Muslim Actors', 81,504 euros (for 2020) and 83,036.28 euros (for 2021) have been allocated. For the projects coordinated by INSSAN, 40,000 euros (in 2020) and 81,504 euros (in 2021) are earmarked for JUMA, and 42,536 euros (in 2017) for CLAIM.										
**) OSI = Open Society Institute, NoG = Not Without My Faith, (100,000) = US dollars										
Sources: The Bundestag documents cited in the text and the documents of the Berlin House of Representatives										

However, these funding amounts are merely 'crumbs' from various 'large cakes'. According to the information in [Bundestag printed paper 19/1012](#), a total of (2015) 78 million euros (78,419,227); for 2016, 99 million euros (98,552,306) have been earmarked; and for 2017, 200 million euros (200,320,537) were earmarked for 2017.

"For measures to strengthen diversity, tolerance and democracy (Chapter 1702, Title 684 04), the federal budget allocated 40 500 000 euros for 2015, 50 500 000 euros for 2016 and 104 500 000 euros for 2017. The trend in the level of funds available in each year is determined by the decisions of the budgetary authority. Total expenditure under the federal programme 'Demokratie leben!' amounted to 37,919,227 euros (2015), 48,052,306 euros (2016) and 95,820,537 euros (2017)."

The rates of increase are significant, and with the right contacts and a sound project concept, sums of 50–100.00 euros are well within reach even for smaller associations.

Other projects in which Inssan is directly involved, but where the association itself does not act as the project organiser, illustrate the confusion surrounding the question 'Who is funding whom or what?'

6.8. Muslim Pastoral Care Helpline (MuTeS). The Berlin [official document 18/10 104](#) states the following:

"The Muslim Pastoral Care Helpline (MuTeS) has been operating in Berlin since 2009. Its sole sponsor is the IRD [Islamic Relief Germany]. The Diakonisches Werk Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia e.V. and the Caritas Association of the Archdiocese of Berlin e.V. are the two cooperation partners involved in running the Muslim Pastoral Helpline. The practical collaboration is organised by the Church Telephone Counselling Service Berlin."

The link to Inssan e.V. lies, amongst other things, in the fact that the driving force behind this project is the then Inssan e.V. board member (2007–2012), *Mohammad Imran Sagir*, who has been the managing director of MuTeS since 1 December 2008.

According to [printed paper 18/15738](#), the launch ceremony for the Muslim Counselling Helpline took place on 2 September 2009 at Berlin City Hall. "Following a resolution by the House of Representatives on the 2016/17 biennial budget, the Muslim Counselling Helpline has been funded with approximately €150,000 annually since 2016. For the year 2018, €143,000 was applied for and approved by means of a grant notification."

The training and further professional development of the staff at the Muslim Pastoral Care Helpline (which, for trade mark reasons, is not permitted to call itself a 'telephone counselling service') is provided by the Church-run (Protestant and Catholic) Telephone Counselling Services.

6.9. Juma – Young, Muslim, Active. Founded in 2010 on the initiative of the then adviser to Senator for the Interior Körtning (SPD) and current State Secretary to the Governing Mayor, *Sawsan Chebli* and other Muslims (SPD), it is officially a project of the RAA (Regional Centre for Education, Integration and Democracy e.V.) and is organised by *Lydia Nofal*, an employee of the RAA and then, as now, a member of the Inssan Executive Board, who acts as project coordinator alongside *Kofi Ohene-Dokyi* as project manager.

The JUMA website explains that the JUMA project was ‘managed’ by her:

“Between 2010 and 2014, Sawsan Chebli was a policy adviser on the staff of the Berlin Senate Department for the Interior and Sport. Here, she worked closely with the respective Senators for the Interior and Sport, Mr Ehrhart Körtning and later Frank Henkel, on the topics of Islam, interfaith dialogue and integration. Sawsan Chebli developed the JUMA project. She managed the project on behalf of the Senate Department for the Interior and Sport in collaboration with the RAA.”

Sawsan Chebli also presented the project herself at the [11th Berlin Prevention Day](#) (2012):

“The JUMA project was launched in December 2010 by the author (Senior Policy Officer for Intercultural Affairs at the Senate Department for the Interior and Sport) and is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs as part of the federal programme ‘Initiative for a Strong Democracy’. JUMA stands for young, Muslim, active. [...]

The project has two objectives: Firstly, it aims to give Muslim young people a voice. They should be able to discuss freely the issues that concern them, what they expect from politics, and where they see shortcomings as well as opportunities. A further key objective of the project is for Muslim young people to take on responsibility and help shape our society. JUMA aims to strengthen Muslim young people’s interest in experiencing democracy and to offer them the opportunity to articulate their attitudes, opinions and positions in the political and media spheres. [...] The direct target group of the JUMA project is Muslim young people aged between 15 and 25 who identify primarily through their Islamic identity. Young people are selected through, amongst other channels, mosque associations, Islamic youth organisations or migrant organisations dedicated to working with Muslim young people. To date, around 100 Muslim young people from Berlin regularly take part in the JUMA project’s events.”

In an interview, *Lydia Nofal* explains ‘what lies behind JUMA’ under the headline: ‘[If Islam is part of your identity, you’ve come to the right place!](#)’, stating:

“JUMA is a platform where young Muslims who want to get involved in society and help shape it can contribute. We always say that if you feel this applies to you – when people talk about Muslims and Islam in Germany, if you want to have your say but don’t feel heard – then you’ve come to the right place. For us, it’s not about how someone practises their religion. We reach out to everyone who sees Islam as part of their identity and is aged between 16 and 25.”

However, ‘Juma’ is not just the abbreviation for ‘young, Muslim, active’ in German; it actually comes from Arabic. In one place, it is stated that ‘Juma’ means ‘Friday gathering’ in Arabic; in another, State Secretary *Sawsan Chebli* (SPD) [comes close to using the correct term](#), noting that it is Arabic for ‘Friday prayer’. (“In the ‘Juma’ project that I launched (‘Juma’ stands for Friday prayer, but also for ‘young, Muslim, active’), ninety per cent of the girls wear a headscarf.”) However, this is actually something of an understatement, as Juma is the major prayer ritual celebrated on Friday during the visit to the mosque, which is obligatory for all male Muslims. Farid Suleiman of the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg writes the following about Friday prayer in the Encyclopaedia of Ecclesiastical and Religious Law:¹⁶

‘The importance and special nature of Juma’ have been emphasised in the Holy Qur’an and the Ahadith. Praying and remembering Allah on this day is a way of receiving special blessings. The time for the Juma’ prayer is the same as that for the Sohr prayer. The Juma’ prayer is obligatory for all adult Muslim men, even if there are only two of them. [...] How the Jumu’ah prayer is performed: As soon as the sun has passed its highest point in the sky, the Adhan (the first of two, which is a distinctive feature of the Jumu’ah prayer) is called. Now is the time to perform the Sunnah prayers associated with Jumu’ah. Before the Imam then stands up for the Khutbah (sermon), the second Adhan is called. Thereafter, the imam stands up and recites the following prayer, followed immediately by Surah Al-Fatiha.”

The Friday prayer is obligatory for every adult, male, free, sane, resident (i.e. non-travelling) Muslim who is no more than just under six kilometres from the place of the Friday prayer. According to a saying of the Prophet, God seals the heart of anyone who neglects the Friday prayer three times in a row out of contempt. Women and children are exempt from attending.

This obligation is traced back to Sura 62 of the Qur'an, entitled 'The Friday', which was revealed in Medina."

The Orientalist Stefan Wild also refers in a multifaceted manner to Friday "as a special Islamic day" ¹⁷, on which a whole range of different acts performed on the eve or on Friday itself were considered particularly blessed, including the major ritual ablution before prayer, cutting one's nails and trimming one's beard. "Sexual intercourse on the eve of prayer was also considered particularly blessed."

The JUMA project was also presented at the [annual conference of the SPD's Working Group on Muslims \(2017\)](#):

"The opening remarks were followed by three substantive presentations. First to speak was Mehmet Senel, regional project coordinator for 'Hessian Muslims for Democracy and Diversity' (HMDV). He presented the HMDV project, explaining the opportunities and challenges involved in collaborating with Muslim organisations, particularly religious associations. Loubna Doudouh then presented the JUMA project – 'Young – Muslim – Active'. She emphasised that JUMA is a place where religious and cultural diversity is lived out in practice. Openness, respect and tolerance are particularly important in this regard. The aim of the project is to empower Muslim young people."

Not a word about 'Islam as part of one's identity', but rather 'religious diversity in practice'.

Is it a contradiction when, on the one hand, a voluntary youth support organisation such as JUMA motivates and encourages ("empowers") young women to profess their Muslim faith publicly by, amongst other things, wearing headscarves? On the other hand, the two driving forces behind JUMA – State Secretary *Sawsan Chebli* and project coordinator *Lydia Nofal* – are both explicitly devout Muslim women, yet neither wears a headscarf: Ms *Chebli* because she believes one cannot pursue a career whilst wearing a headscarf, and Ms *Nofal* because she does not want to be stared at. However, it is clearly implicitly expected of the girls in the JUMA project – given that 9 out of 10 do so – that they should wear a headscarf; in other words, that they will be stared at and will not be able to pursue a career?

That sounds more like deliberate exploitation and marginalisation. It would not be a contradiction if the intention were to develop future female leaders who would remain within a Muslim 'inner sphere' – outside the secular mainstream of society – where they remain amongst themselves, and are therefore not stared at, and pursue careers within these marginalised organisations? In this respect, one must ask whether the JUMA project contributes to integration or whether it rather constitutes explicit proselytising and exclusion?

Furthermore, this JUMA project arises against a backdrop where the 2016 study '[Integration and Religion from the Perspective of People of Turkish Origin in Germany](#)' found that, on the one hand, younger people attend mosques and pray less frequently, but on the other hand, they express a higher self-assessment of their religiosity than their elders. Is it "a demonstrative affirmation of one's own cultural origins"?

"The patterns of balance between a willingness to adapt and self-assertion recur when it comes to the religiosity of people of Turkish origin in Germany. On the one hand, with regard to traditional religious practice, the second and third generations prove to be less active than the first generation. For instance, the second and third generations attend the mosque less frequently than the first generation (23 per cent versus 32 per cent weekly or more often) and are also significantly less likely to say they perform personal prayers several times a day (35 per cent versus 55 per cent). On the other hand, the second and third generations consider themselves to be more religious than the first generation (72 per cent vs. 62 per cent who describe themselves as 'deeply', 'very' or 'somewhat' religious). It is possible that the answers to this question reflect not so much 'actually practised' religiosity as a demonstrative affirmation of one's own cultural heritage."

The large event hall in the 'Rotes Rathaus' in Berlin (the official residence of the Governing Mayor, who holds a rank equivalent to that of a Minister-President) is made available free of charge for JUMA events.

According to figures on [participant numbers](#) provided by the Robert Bosch Foundation: "In close cooperation with mosques and Islamic organisations, around 100 young people will be trained between April 2014 and April 2016 to act as multipliers and 'bridge-builders' within their communities." That amounts to 50 young people per year.

The funding remains unclear, as the Robert Bosch Foundation does not provide any information upon request and refers enquiries to the JUMA project management, from whom, however, no response or information is forthcoming upon request.

6.10. CLAIM Alliance.

Founded in June 2018, with (as of April 2020) 38 member organisations. The right-hand part of the name contains the initial letters of the 'Alliance against Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Sentiment'. And the CL? As I was told upon enquiry, 'the CL does not function as an acronym. The name was chosen, amongst other reasons, because it can be used internationally and stands for a self-assured commitment to our goals.'

It will [be presented](#) at the Federal Press Conference Centre on [26 June 2018](#). The [panellists](#) are not listed in the order in which they will sit (from left to right), but according to their importance: *Thomas Heppener* (Head of the 'Democracy and Diversity' Division, Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth), *Nina Mühe* (CLAIM Project Manager), *Zeynep Cetin* (Inssan e.V. – Network against Discrimination and Islamophobia) and *Eva Andrades* (TBB – Turkish Federation of Brandenburg, ADNB project).

What is remarkable is not merely that a senior ministry official is sitting on the podium, but that he is a head of division. [Thomas Heppener](#) (born in 1966) heads [Division 102, 'Promotion of Democracy'](#), at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and is thus also responsible for the 'Demokratie leben!' programme, from which a total of [115.5 million euros will be disbursed](#) in 2020.

According to Federal Minister Dr Franziska Giffey, the programme's significance lies above all in its support for local communities:

"Two priorities are particularly important to me in the new funding period for 'Demokratie leben!': Firstly, we are stepping up our commitment to combating right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism. For the first time, there will be dedicated networks of expertise involving experienced organisations at federal level to pool and further improve efforts against anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism. Secondly, we have placed a focus on local civil society. Additional funding is being channelled to the 'Partnerships for Democracy' in 300 local authorities, where more than 4,000 individual projects have been implemented annually to date. 'Demokratie leben!' remains a strong programme for our liberal democracy in its second funding period."

Funding for 'Demokratie leben!' is secured until 2023, and beneficiaries include, amongst others, Aktion Courage e. V., Schule ohne Rassismus, Berlin / RAA Berlin, Berlin / CLAIM / Teilseind e. V. Berlin Office / Ufuq e. V., Berlin. (In the [Partnership for Democracy in the Berlin district of Neukölln](#), 'Key Objective 1' is: 'To demonstrate the compatibility of Islam and democracy.')

This reveals a clear sequence in Issan's successful lobbying: first, 'Christian backing' through invitations to participate as a speaker at the Evangelical Academy in Loccum (2004–2006), then the establishment of contact at the Loccum Academy (2009) between the head of the 'Youth Work' at the BMFSFJ, Issan, Muslim Youth and Milli Görüs. However, all of this remained outside the wider public eye. The press conference at the Federal Press Conference Centre now highlights the public recognition by the relevant federal ministry and thus 'the blessing (and the money) from above'.

CLAIM's mission statement reads:

"Racism and discrimination are not a problem for a minority but threaten our social cohesion as a whole. Through CLAIM, we are working to address this growing problem affecting society as a whole. We counter developments that threaten the common good in Germany and Europe with information and prevention. We form a broad social alliance against the exclusion of Muslims, against intolerance, discrimination, and hostility towards Islam and Muslims."

The CLAIM project leader, *Dr Nina Mühe*, is ([according to a report](#) by Inssan advisory board member Barbara John) also a member of Inssan e.V., and Inssan itself is among [the group of experts](#) acting in an advisory capacity to the CLAIM Alliance:

"*Prof. Iman Attia* (Professor of Critical Diversity Studies, Racism and Migration at Alice Salomon University, Berlin) / *Daniel Bax* (Project Manager at Mediendienst Integration, on the board of Neue Deutsche Medienmacher) / *Engin Karahan* (political adviser and advisory board member of the Alhambra Society) / *Lydia Nofal* (Project Manager at INSSAN e.V.) / *Prof. Dr Werner Schiffauer* (Senior Scholar at the European University Viadrina, former Chair of the Council on Migration / *Aliyeh Yegane* (Head of the Anti-Discrimination and Diversity Division in Schools at LIFE e.V.) / *Lamya Kaddor* (Project Manager of the research project on 'Islamophobia in Adolescence', co-founder of the Liberal-Islamic Association e.V.)"

One could also refer to these experts, who are repeatedly cited in various combinations, as the 'Schiffauer Circle'.

'CLAIM' is a project run by MUTIK gGmbH and the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) as part of the federal programme 'Demokratie leben!' and is funded by the Mercator Foundation.

It's an intellectual romp and shows that there are intelligent people at work here. Just as with 'Juma' – where the Arabic original makes it unmistakably clear what the content is about (the Great Friday Prayer and thus 'Islam as identity') – so too is the case with 'CLAIM'. In English, it also carries the meaning of a claim, a staked-out area for which one alone holds the licence, for example, to mine for gold. As with other projects, such as feminism, the primary aim is to create state-funded jobs for oneself. The Turkish anthropologist *Esra Özyürek* writes on this subject: ¹⁸

"Although invisible in public discourse, German converts are over-represented in public roles related to Islam – for example, as chairpersons of nationwide Islamic organisations, Muslim representatives in interfaith dialogue, authors of Islam-friendly newspaper commentaries, or as academics conducting state-funded or university research projects on Muslims. Many native-born and converted Muslims explained to me that, at a time when most followers of their faith in Germany were migrant workers with insufficient language skills and social competencies, there had been no alternative; however, this trend shows no sign of abating, but could well become entrenched as a tradition."

7. What am I? And if, as suggests, there are many of me?

One of the hallmarks of ideologically committed organisations in Germany – which, whilst claiming to represent a large number of followers, reveal a clear discrepancy between their active members and their supporters – is the Evangelicals, who, like 'Potemkin villages', are constantly founding new organisations and launching new campaigns, but always with more or less the same personnel. Inssan e.V., a Muslim organisation that advocates for anti-discrimination and unrestricted religious freedom, also appears to be caught between its stated aims and reality.

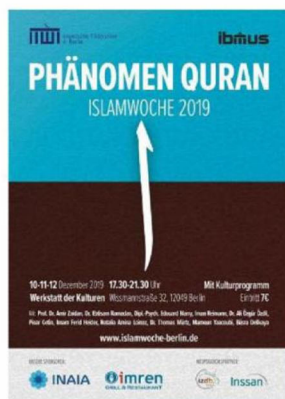
Looking at the personal memberships of the chairperson and the managing director of Inssan e.V., the two of them together are members of ten organisations. (see fig. on the following page)

A certain division of labour is also evident here: the chairperson, *Lydia Nofal* (as a woman and a convert), tends to organise the civil society/political spectrum (RAA, Aktion Courage, AK Musli-me of the SPD, Leadership Berlin and JUMA), whilst the managing director, *Mohamad Hajjaj*, (as a man) is more responsible for religious connections (Muslim Youth, Islamic Federation, IBMus, teiba Cultural Centre/Mosque, Central Council of Muslims – Berlin Regional Association). Both are members of the political organisation (AKM of the SPD) and also in the religious organisation most important to Inssan (ZDM), both are members.

As every organisation and every project (no matter how small) has its own logo, these can now 'colourful variety' of logos can represent quite a lot.



- For the WEGWEISER project, Inssan is named as the organising body, and the Central Council of Muslims and JUMA as cooperation partners. Ms *Nofal* can therefore sign the cooperation agreement three times on her own.
- The organisers of the expert conference (October 2019) 'Refuge, Migration, Home(s) – Muslims in Germany' are: Inssan e.V., the WEGWEISER project and the 'Nicht ohne meinen Glauben' project – all of which are Inssan's own initiatives.
- The organisers of the workshop (November 2019) 'Blogging against Islamophobia' are the Teiba Cultural Centre, Inssan and the 'Network against Discrimination and Islamophobia' project – the managing director can sign this three times on his own.
- On the 'Appeal by Religious Organisations on the Amazon Crisis' (2019) against the catastrophic wildfires there, the logos of 17 initial signatories are featured, six of which are direct personal Inssan networks: Islamic Federation, IBMus, Central Council of Muslims, Teiba e.V., Muslim Pastoral Care Helpline and Inssan itself.
- For [Islam Week](#) (December 2019), two organisers are named with their logos: the Islamic Federation and IBMus; cooperation partners are: Inssan and the IZDB (Intercultural Centre for Dialogue and Education). Sponsors include six restaurants, halal butchers and a financial services provider, as well as – given the IZDB's proximity, it would be unthinkable not to include it – Islamic Relief.



Islamwoche 2019 PHÄNOMEN QURAN

10-11-12 Dezember 2019
17.30 – 21.30 Uhr

Kooperationspartner:

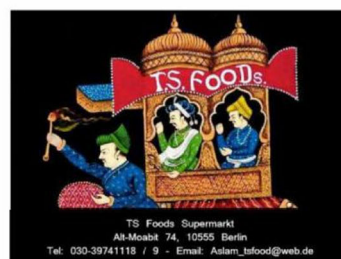
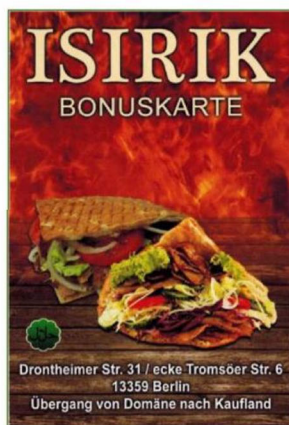
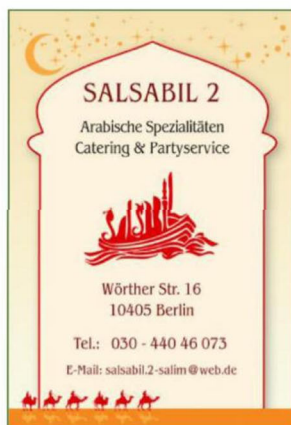


Sponsoren:



Finanzdienstleister

Restaurant



These examples could be continued almost indefinitely. The basic principle is the same: a diversity is portrayed that does not actually exist.

At the same time, the announcements of events and the sponsors mentioned therein – including the sponsors of the 2006 Inssan Festival – show that in Germany there is also considerable financial gain to be had for organisations that guide their members to live according to the rules of Islam – particularly the distinction between ‘halal’ (permitted) and ‘haram’ (forbidden).

Turks in Germany alone have a purchasing power of [more than 20 billion euros](#), and the 400 companies offering halal products in Germany generate a turnover of approximately five billion euros. Of the approximately 40,000 Muslims who die in Germany each year, around 85 per cent are repatriated to their home countries, as this is [more cost-effective](#) (2,000 euros) than a funeral in Germany (6,000 euros) and also means that even within the immediate family circle, around 40 relatives do not have to apply for visas or pay for flights and hotels. This represents a turnover of around 70 million euros.

Major organisations such as Milli Görüs list services on their websites (and presumably also locally) such as the [IGMG Bestattungshilfeverein e. V.](#) or, for the obligatory pilgrimages to Mecca, their own travel agencies such as [IGMG Hadsch und Umra Reisen GmbH](#).

As Inssan sees itself as a religious organisation that is politically active, such services and revenue-generating opportunities are not pursued.

8. What form of Islam does Inssan e. V. advocate?

There is no publicly available document in which Inssan declares, outlines or explains which denomination or interpretation of Islam the association is aligned with or belongs to. This is something of a gap, which is surprising for an organisation that explicitly describes itself as Muslim.

However, if one takes as a basis what the Berlin Higher Administrative Court stated in its 1998 ruling that the Islamic Federation of Berlin was a religious community (OVG 7 B 4/98)¹⁹, this enquiry is not only entirely superfluous, because it is pointless, but even inadmissible:

‘Faith based on the Qur’an and the Sunnah is sufficient to establish a consensus. Contrary to the view of the Administrative Court, it is legally irrelevant that the Qur’an and the Sunnah (the transmitted sayings, actions and decisions of the Prophet Muhammad) form the basis of faith for all Muslims. For – as explained – the claimant cannot be required to commit to a specific denomination within Islam, in particular to distinguish itself, in its statutes, from the Shia or any other denomination, given that the majority of its Turkish members belong to the Sunni denomination. If the claimant, as he expressly stated before the Senate, regards his comprehensive creed based on the Qur’an and the Sunnah as an ecumenical understanding of religion, this must be respected as an expression of his religious self-understanding. [...]

It is well known that Islam does not recognise corporate forms of organisation comparable to those of the Christian Church; it rejects hierarchical structures. There is no need for a priest; rather, the Muslim stands – without an intermediary – in a direct relationship with God. Islam has no clergy as understood in the European Christian tradition, and representative parish councils are alien to it. It has no bodies that could speak with binding official authority on matters of faith. Consequently, the fact that the claimant umbrella organisation has not organised itself beyond the usual minimum structures of a registered association, and that a religious leader is not stipulated in its articles of association, is intrinsically linked to the substance and self-understanding of Islam and must be accepted by the defendant as an expression of this Islamic religion’s right to self-determination. Consequently – contrary to the view of the Administrative Court – it is precisely not the case that the purported standards of Western legal tradition should be applied, nor should an adaptation of the internal organisational structure of Islamic associations to comparable structures of the Christian Church be demanded.”

However, an account of the first meetings of [the Islamforum Berlin](#) shows that the question of ‘Islam’ reflects reality, as the various communities do indeed agree amongst themselves that they are ‘Muslims’ and that there is no central authority for all Muslims in Berlin.

“With regard to the composition of the Muslim participants – described by the organisers as ‘explosive’ – some of the respondents expressed criticism primarily on two points. The first point of criticism for them is the participation of the Ahmadiyya Community of Berlin and the Alevis in the Berlin Islam Forum,

as these groups are not 'Muslims' and therefore, in the view of some respondents, do not fall within the scope of a 'dialogue with Islam'. [...]

In this respect, the assessment is confirmed that the various Muslim participants 'get on' surprisingly well with one another in the forum without 'excommunicating' one another, something they are usually quite prone to doing. Furthermore, the 'diversity of mosque life and community life' sought by the organisers – which is intended to be reflected in the forum's composition – is viewed critically by some of the respondents as incomplete. Some voices feel that this desired diversity does not yet go far enough and are calling for the participation of further Muslim groups and nationalities that have not been taken into account in the forum's composition to date. At this point, two difficulties in engaging with 'Muslims' in Germany become clearly apparent. Firstly, the great heterogeneity within Islam raises the question of who should actually take part in a 'dialogue with Islam'; and secondly, the fact that there is no central authority representing all Muslims leads to the difficult question of who can lay claim to represent 'the Muslims' in Berlin."

Following the media attention (2007/2008) surrounding the planned construction of a mosque on Mierendorffplatz in Berlin, the co-founder of Issan e.V., *Lydia Nofal*, spoke on the subject in four interviews. The first was in November 2007 on [Deutschlandfunk](#):

"Lydia Nofal, too, is redefining for herself the role that converts play in Islamic society. The 40-year-old political scientist and mother of three studied in London in a multicultural environment, came into contact with Muslims and has felt at home in Islam for 16 years now. In Berlin, she co-founded the association Issan – a Muslim group that expressly aims to be guided by the realities of life in Germany.

'We distinguish between Muslims who have been socialised here, whose mother tongue is German, and first-generation migrants, who are still very strongly oriented towards their country of origin and for whom German is also a foreign language. And for us, it is important that German Muslims – second- and third-generation Muslims, or indeed converts – increasingly exert influence on the work within the community. It's a question of whether you feel at home here or not.'

According to Lydia Nofal, mosque associations whose members are predominantly migrants are now managing their own affairs more and more independently. The influence of converts is waning, says the German Muslim woman. And vice versa? Lydia Nofal, who does not wear a headscarf because she hates being looked at askance for it, insists that her association, Inssan, is perceived as theologically independent, even though Islamist foundations are likely to co-fund the planned Inssan mosque. 'Nobody is trying to infiltrate us,' says Nofal, a member of the SPD. '

'We seek contact with other Muslim organisations; we cooperate with them; we involve them in our work in areas where we share the same goals – namely to work together – and I see a very, very broad consensus there.'

It is a collaboration that is at times pragmatic, at times cordial – and if the partner organisations hold more traditional views on Islam, then this is either respected or discussed."

This portrayal of 'theological independence' is also evident in an interview with the [BZ-Berlin](#), in which she commented that she liked the 'simplicity of Islam' and that Inssan did not advocate 'a very conservative form of Islam':

"The planned mosque construction in Charlottenburg. The 'Inssan' association intends to build a Muslim centre on Mierendorffplatz at a cost of six million euros. For the first time, a member of Inssan's executive board has now spoken out on the financing of the mosque, which is to accommodate 700 visitors.

'60 per cent of the construction costs are to be raised by mosque foundations in the Gulf states, with the remainder coming from donations,' says Lydia Nofal (40) from Neukölln. Originally from the Sauerland region, she is a founding member of 'Inssan'. Raised as a Catholic, she converted to Islam 17 years ago. 'I like the simplicity of Islam,' she says. The mother of three, who is married to a native Palestinian, does not wear a headscarf. The financiers – two prominent Arab rulers. One is Sultan Alkasimi, ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, who, as a major shareholder in the VW Group, has already had a mosque built in Wolfsburg. The other is the ruler of Qatar. He co-founded the TV channel Al Jazeera. Neither of them are 'bigoted fundamentalists', says Nofal, addressing the fears of residents of Mierendorffplatz. 'We do not represent a very conservative form of Islam. In our mosque, men and women will pray together in the same hall.' Nor will there be any pressure on women to wear the headscarf.

Nofal did, however, confirm that the mosque association 'Inssan' (50 members), founded in 2002, maintains contacts with the Islamic Community in Germany (IGD). According to the assessment of the domestic intelligence services, this group is regarded as an offshoot of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt."

However, this has done little to clarify the matter. Nor does it make it clear whether the joint prayers will take place in a mixed setting – with women and men side by side in one hall – or in separate areas – with men at the front and women at the back of the hall. This ‘simplicity of Islam’ was also a key factor in the conversion of other converts (*‘Christian is now called Ab-dul’*).

In October 2007, the **taz** published an interview with *Lydia Nofal* under the headline: “*Islam doesn’t need a church*”.

‘What is your cultural background? Where are you from?’

I come from a small village in the Sauerland, in North Rhine-Westphalia. A strictly Catholic and very conservative village. That part of the country is even more traditional than Bavaria: people went to church three times a week. The SPD didn’t even stand in the local elections.

Did you rebel against that Catholic and conservative environment back then?

Not at first; I was actually very active in the church. I used to lead Bible readings. I can remember reading from the Epistles of Paul and thinking to myself, ‘What on earth are you reading?’ At 17, I left the church and became politically more left-leaning. I was a reader of the **taz**. Now I’m in the SPD. [...]

Why did you need a different religion? Weren’t you fed up with it?

What do you mean, ‘need’ – do you actually need it? Of course, you can go through life as an agnostic. But that’s actually a shame, because then you’re not able to take in a lot of things, I think.

What, for example?

I find that very difficult to put into words. The whole spiritual dimension is very hard to perceive if you don’t believe in God. The Qur’an speaks of the signs of God, so you don’t recognise God himself, but you recognise the signs of God.

But if I believe in God and want to recognise the signs of God – do I then need a religion that lays down rules for me? That tells me, for example: ‘You mustn’t eat during daylight hours’?

It’s not really a question of whether I need a religion. I simply think that if you believe in God, it broadens your perspective. And the rules are really nothing more than a means of helping you to draw closer to God. Fasting, for example, helps us to detach ourselves somewhat from the everyday and to reflect more on what is essential in life. [...]

There were quite a few things in Christianity that I found incomprehensible, unacceptable. The idea that Jesus came into the world to redeem humanity from original sin – that doesn’t fit with my view of humanity. It’s different in Islam, and in Judaism too: there, a person is born free; they don’t need to be redeemed. As a free person, they are fully responsible for their actions. In Islam, because there is no church standing between man and God, the individual is much freer. In his Regensburg speech, the Pope established a link between Greek reason and the Catholic Church. I do not believe that the Catholic faith is compatible with reason. I do, however, believe that Islam is compatible with reason. To grasp this, though, one must first get to the heart of the actual religious teachings. And engage with them.”

In January 2008, Lydia Nofal said in an interview with the **Tagesspiegel** (“*I don’t wear a headscarf either*”), that Inssan does not represent “a very conservative form of Islam”.

“How should European Islam differ from Islam in Arab countries?”

In terms of principles, there is no difference. But in Islam, there have always been differing opinions on many issues. On the subject of women’s rights, for example, we are developing different positions here. Women are now represented on the executive committees of many Muslim organisations in Germany.”

Inssan practises a very conservative form of Islam. Male members are reluctant to shake hands with me, a Christian woman. Many women wear headscarves. Should there be separate rooms for women and men at the Charlottenburg Mosque?

“We do not practise a very conservative form of Islam. In our mosque, men and women will pray together in the same hall. However, there will be women’s rooms and a counselling service for women who are experiencing problems in their marriage, with bringing up their children, or with finding work. There is also no pressure to wear a headscarf. Even though we regard it as a religious duty – I don’t wear one myself, after all.”

In this interview, too, the question regarding the interpretation of Islam is answered only in general terms. It sounds more like a ‘do-it-yourself patchwork Islam’, where everyone picks and chooses elements of their faith and then labels this as ‘Muslim’ because it refers primarily to the Qur’an, which –

just like the Bible – can be interpreted in very different and even contradictory ways.

In this respect, it is noteworthy what Inssan has done in the ‘headscarf dispute’ arising from Berlin’s Neutrality Act, in which Muslim primary schoolteachers are seeking to enforce their right to wear their religiously motivated headscarves in class – something not permitted under the Neutrality Act – when the liberal Muslim woman and imam Seyran Ateş [was appointed](#) as a legal adviser to the education authority:

‘By appointing Ms Ateş as its official representative, the education authority has staged a political battle. Ms Ateş is a criminal and family law solicitor; if she is representing the Senate on the basis of her theological knowledge, this debate should take place outside the judicial sphere, as it is irrelevant when one considers the core of religious freedom. Individual and communal understandings of religiosity must also be protected from hypothetical and non-existent dangers that are supposedly posed solely by the wearing of the headscarf. ‘The State of Berlin apparently wishes, through Ms Ateş, to engage in interpretations of religion, which directly contravenes state neutrality,’ said Zeynep Çetin from the Network Against Discrimination and Islamophobia.

Inssan e.V. refuses to become involved in such a theological debate. It is neither the role of the courts nor of the state to declare a ‘correct’ interpretation of the Qur’an. If the state truly wishes to be neutral, it must accept the fact that here in Berlin and Germany, multiple cultures, religions and worldviews coexist, and treat them as equally important and on an equal footing. Furthermore, freedom of occupation must be guaranteed. According to our understanding of democracy and human rights, it is unacceptable that, in Germany in 2017, a ban on women practising a profession should be legitimised and enforced.”

One could certainly interpret this to mean that Inssan e.V. does not feel able to explain its interpretation of the Qur’an – although it is irrelevant in this context whether one regards this view as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

However, a picture is gradually emerging from the partial findings so far – the terms mentioned are spirituality, identity and the role of women – whilst everything else is left open – which is very close to (1) the views of *Ali Shariati* and (2) Sufism, and (3) constitutes an orthodox interpretation.

(1) The well-known convert *Kristiane Backer*, who was one of the star presenters at the 2006 INSSAN Festival, writes about her journey to Islam²⁰ and the ‘fundamental evil’ of the Western world, namely the ‘lack of spirituality’ and the absence of an ‘intimate experience of being embraced by God’:

‘I read. Out of curiosity, I asked Imran to lend me a few of his books, and I retreated with them to the privacy of my own home. He was delighted by my interest. The very first book he gave me made quite an impression on me. It was called **Man and Islam** and was written by Ali Shariati, a Persian sociologist who had died in 1977 under circumstances that were never fully clarified. He had taught at university in Iran for many years but was repeatedly imprisoned because his theories did not seem to conform to the state’s ideology in the eyes of the Islamic authorities.

The book is by no means about veils, strict commandments or prayer times; rather, Shariati writes about philosophical concepts and true fulfilment: ‘Through science, humankind can free itself from the shackles of nature and history. But to free itself from the cage of the self and give the soul wings, it needs love and religion.’ [...] The author goes on to diagnose the fundamental ills afflicting the Western world in particular as a lack of spirituality, the absence of inner support within a sacred sphere, and the intimate experience of being embraced by God.”

Ms Backer prefaces her book with the dedication ‘Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim – In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate’ and describes, amongst other things, ‘My Sufi Path’.

Regarding [Ali Shariati](#) (German spelling), whom she mentions, the text states, amongst other things:

‘The idea that Islam could point to a Third Way – effectively an alternative social model to the crude materialism of communism and the base greed of capitalism – seemed too tempting to resist. Islam, which had always been regarded as backward and regressive, had suddenly entered the modern age through Shariati’s writings. [...]

His writings, centred on the battle of ideas, political struggle and a new concept of education, had a major influence on Iran’s young intellectuals and led many into the fundamentalist movement. [...]

In the mid-1960s, the circle of clerics around Ayatollah Khomeini – including Mahmoud Taleghani, Morteza Motahhari and Mohammad Beheshti – came up with the idea of developing a new type of mosque, the *Hoseiniye-Erschād*, to appeal to the Iranian middle class. In this new type of mosque, people did not sit on the floor but on chairs, and the preacher stood at a lectern rather than sitting on a raised pulpit. Ali Shariati was invited as a guest speaker in 1965 and soon rose to become the institution's star speaker, captivating its ever-growing audience. In his speeches, Ali Shariati extolled the path of the Shia martyr as 'the only path leading to truth and justice', and he urged his listeners to 'kill the tyrants or die'.

Ali Shariati developed the theory that there were two forms of Islam: the 'pure and authentic' Islam of Ali, and the 'corrupt Islam' of the Safavids, the ruling class, which he claimed had brought nothing but oppression and exploitation. With this theory, Shariati opposed the clergy, who increasingly distanced themselves from him and issued fatwas against him. He was accused of teaching Wahhabism or of having apostatised from the Shia faith."

In his lecture '[Fatima is Fatima](#)' (delivered in July 1971), *Ali Shariati* places women at the centre of his reflections:

"In our society, women are changing rapidly. Time and circumstances, as well as the influence of institutions, are distancing them from 'what they are' and stripping them of their traditional characteristics and values in order to turn them into 'what they want to be'; as we can see, they are succeeding in this. Therefore, the most critical question for a self-assured woman in this day and age is: 'How should I be?' For she knows full well that she cannot remain as she is. She does not remain that way, nor can she, because she is not allowed to. On the other hand, she does not wish to accept the modern mask with which she is supposed to cover her old appearance. She wants to decide for herself, to choose her new identity herself. She wants to apply her new make-up with self-confidence, independence and authenticity. But she does not know how. Although she knows that her human countenance is neither the traditional appearance nor the imposed and imitated make-up mask, she does not know what she is supposed to look like.

A second question arises from the following considerations: we are Muslims; the woman in our society who wishes to gain her independence in order to make her own choices is bound to a history, culture, religion and society that have been spiritually influenced by Islam. A woman who wishes to preserve her identity and develop freely within this society, who in her rebirth wishes to be her own midwife rather than a product of tradition and imitation, cannot remain indifferent to Islam. It is only natural that she should give this matter some thought."

These two elements – 'the arrival of Islam in the modern age' and the particular significance of women's identity and independence, as they are 'the midwives of their own rebirth' – are likely to be of particular importance to German female converts.

(2) Ms Backer, as well as the author *Navid Kermani*, who was invited by Inssan at a very early stage, are or are regarded as followers of Sufism. Inssan: 18 February 2005, 'Literary Mosque', reading and discussion with *Navid Kermani*: 'Muslims in Germany'. 'Few authors convey such a balanced view ... of Islam.' (Die Zeit).

Navid Kermani, a practising Muslim, "has been awarded numerous prestigious cultural and literary prizes. From 2006 to 2009, he was a member of the German Islam Conference, and since 2013 he has served on the board of trustees of the Avicenna-Studienwerk. On 23 May 2014, *Navid Kermani* was the keynote speaker at a ceremony held by the German Bundestag to mark the proclamation of the Basic Law on 23 May 1949. In 2015, he received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade."

Writing on Sufism, the columnist Syed Qamar Afzal Rizwi (in February 2017) stated in **Die Zeit**: "[Islam's most powerful weapon is love.](#)"

"The most enlightened centuries of Muslim civilisation were characterised by Sufism. We should therefore promote the dissemination of its teachings in schools and mosques worldwide today. For Sufism embodies some key fundamental values of Islamic teaching: humanism, compassion and philanthropy. By promoting the ideas of Islamic Sufism more strongly, we could not only create a counterbalance to extremism, but also to the growing Islamophobia.

Islamic teaching is shaped by two schools of thought: the first is based on *Sharia*, the guidelines and principles adopted by orthodox Islamic thinkers, which are strictly binding. The second is based on the *Tariqat*, a spiritual methodology adopted by Sufism, which is regarded as the forerunner of a liberal interpretation of Islam."

And he identifies the very core as the path to an 'inner centre', in which 'everyone experiences God in the same way':

"Intellectual Sufism was shaped by the great mystics Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240) and Celaleddin Rumi (1207–1273). Rumi, the most significant Persian poet of the Middle Ages and founder of the Order of the Whirling Dervishes, is its most popular exponent. Rumi acted as a bridge between Western ethics and an Islamic understanding of morality. Islamic poets and thinkers have repeatedly drawn on Rumi's poetry to shed light on religious differences or to gain access to modern issues through his verses. In the West, Rumi's message has become synonymous with spiritual union with the Beloved, with God.

For Rumi, Allah was the Creator and the God of all people and all religions. Despite his extremely tolerant attitude towards other religions, he derived his concept of God solely from the Qur'an. [...]

The Sufis go radically beyond the traditional concept of God. According to them, mystics should detach themselves from conventional creeds and reach an inner centre where everyone experiences God in the same way. According to Ibn al-Arabi, God is more all-encompassing than any rigidly fixed conception of him found in a holy scripture, and is therefore also greater than the God presented in the Qur'an."

In contrast, the journalist Stefan Weidner points out that the view of Sufism as a more liberal form of Islam is a [misunderstanding](#).

"A Sufi order is not a community that shuts itself off from the world, like a Christian monastic order. Rather, membership of such an order is more akin to that of a sports club or a political party, only with a religious orientation. What attracts many people in the West to it is not least the aforementioned spiritual communal experience of the zikr, which lifts the adepts out of their everyday lives once a week.

By integrating their members and providing them with spiritual guidance, Sufi orders fulfil an important socio-political function. One might think they would be the ideal places to catch those who are mentally unstable and indoctrinated with Islamist ideology, and who seem susceptible to the terrorist propaganda of the so-called Islamic State. Unfortunately, however, the appeal of Sufism is waning in the Islamic world, whilst Salafism – financed by Saudi money – is increasingly laying claim to spiritual leadership as well. [...]

The image of Islamic mysticism as an opponent of Salafism and orthodoxy is thus more complex than it appears from a Western perspective. Sufism is neither apolitical nor progressive in the Western sense. [...]

Today, by contrast, it seems as though Islam is the threat and Sufism the salvation — not only for Islam (from itself), but also for the West from spiritual impoverishment. Numerous contemporary German authors make no secret of their affinity with Sufism — Ilija Trojanow, Christoph Peters, Navid Kermani and Peter Handke are merely the best known."

(3) In its emphasis on the 'true faith' and 'true Islam', this interpretation of Islam bears distinct similarities to orthodox ('orthodox/strict') evangelical Christians, who also believe in the 'true Bible' as the 'Word of God', yet otherwise organise pop festivals using state-of-the-art technology. In this respect, there is certainly a religious affinity – in the focus on the 'true religion' – with Salafists and with a 'pop jihad', i.e. a connection between unconditional faith as part of one's personal identity and an otherwise 'individual' life – within the bounds of religious rules.

This also explains why, in its early phase (2003–2008), Inssan not only sought tactical proximity to Milli Görüs and the Muslim Brotherhood – alongside Ditib, they are the two largest mosque operators in Germany – but is also substantively aligned with their concept of 'true Islam'. This also clarifies, in terms of substance, what the anthropologist Esra Özyürek meant when she described Inssan:²¹

"Another [...] Islamic organisation with no ties to a specific school of thought and no representative character is Inssan ('Human'). It was founded predominantly by converts who follow a significantly more orthodox interpretation of Islam than the Muslim Academy and who continue to shape the organisation to a decisive extent to this day."

This view is confirmed when one reads the [description of the Qur'an](#) on the website of the Teiba Cultural Centre, whose deputy chairman is Inssan's managing director, *Mohammad Hajjaj*:

“The Qur’an is the Word of God, transmitted to us in its entirety. Not only have the words of the Qur’an reached us without error, but even the pronunciation of every word and every letter has been preserved for us.

The very first revelation commanded the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, to recite the Qur’an, as follows: ‘Read in the name of your Lord who created,’ (96:1)

Every Monday from 6.30 pm to 8 pm, the Teiba Cultural Centre offers a course for brothers to learn the correct and proper pronunciation when reciting the Qur’an! This course is led by Brother Jasir. Prior registration is requested.”

These views reveal a considerable affinity with the milieu of extremist Salafists. A recent study by the Institute for Islamic Theology at the University of Osnabrück, entitled:

‘[Religion as a Factor in Radicalisation?](#)’ the role of the ‘true religion’, particularly for converts:

“According to some experts, extremists deliberately exploit young people’s desire for a sense of belonging. They target in particular those young people who feel excluded from ‘mainstream society’ and have the impression that they cannot fit in anywhere. According to Salafist ideology, it does not matter which country one comes from, what one’s socio-economic background is, or whether one is young or old, poor or rich. The common thread is a commitment to Islam and adherence to religious teachings. According to the experts, this makes a particularly strong impression on vulnerable young people, but also on those who are in the midst of identity crises or other challenges. An example of this, repeatedly cited in the interviews, is the dilemma already described: that members of the second and third generations of migrants often feel they are caught between two worlds. According to the experts interviewed, they are confronted from all sides with expectations that are sometimes contradictory. Salafist propaganda, it is argued, resolves this dilemma by elevating belonging to Islam to the sole criterion for self-identification and one’s place in society.”

In this respect, the notion of ‘Islam as part of one’s identity’ (Inssan/JUMA) and the [way members present themselves](#) fills the ‘void’ mentioned at the outset, as the ‘true religion’ is likely to be the unifying foundation of Inssan.

“Consequently, Inssan promoted its ideas among Muslims and people of other faiths alike, and it became apparent that there was a great need for them. As new supporters joined, the number of cultures represented within the association also increased. Today, Inssan’s membership comprises people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins.”

This is also reflected in a description in which Inssan takes pride in its diversity, but it remains unclear what the young people have in common:²²

“Over there – that must be them!” calls out one of the three women who had been keeping watch at the door. She has her long hair tied back in a loose plait and is wearing a denim jacket and baggy trousers. She now runs towards a group of young men: “Those are our mentees,” explains the other woman. “We’re from Wegweiser, the mentoring project for refugees,” says the third woman by way of explanation. However, this tends to cause more confusion rather than less. After all, Wegweiser is a project run by the charity Inssan e. V., and one would expect a project run by a Muslim organisation to involve primarily devout Muslims. These three women, however, do not fit the stereotype of religious activists at all. Instead of fashionable headscarves, they wear their hair loose, and one of them even has a small cross dangling from her neck above a low-cut neckline. Inssan e. V. is proud of this diversity.”

“Fashionable headscarf – loose hair – small cross – low-cut neckline” – what connects these mentors? Islam alone – specifically interpreted as “part of one’s personal identity”?

9. Establishment, further networking and anchoring

The future path of Inssan e.V. can be illustrated both through the people involved and through its memberships in other organisations.

Lydia Nofal, the chair of Inssan, who has already been mentioned several times, is also instrumental in the association’s wider networking, as is Inssan’s managing director, *Mohammad Hajjaj*.

In 2014, *Lydia Nofal* co-founded and became spokesperson for the Working Group on Muslims in the SPD, of which *Mohammad Hajjaj* is also a member. In 2015, she became deputy chair of ZDM Berlin (Central

Council of Muslims, Berlin Regional Association), of which *Hajjaj* is chair – as deputy chair of the Teiba Cultural Centre. In 2019, *Lydia Nofal* (a graduate in political science) became a member of the advisory board of the Institute for Islamic Theology at Humboldt University in Berlin as a representative of the ZDM with expertise in theology. *Mohammad Hajjaj* is also a member of the board of directors of the Islamic Federation of Berlin.

9.1. Muslim Working Group within the SPD

The ‘German Turks’, i.e. the majority of Muslims in Germany, were for many years a ‘reliable pillar’ of the SPD’s electorate. As [the FAZ](#) reported [in 2018](#):

‘The SPD had long since lost “the worker” as a loyal voter, but there was still one group it could rely on: the German Turks. Among them, it achieved phenomenal results. In the 2013 federal election, according to the opinion research institute “Data4U”, which specialises in surveys of migrants, 64 per cent voted for the Social Democrats. At that point, the SPD was still entirely at peace with itself, as it has always seen itself as a party for migrants. In 2011, it introduced a quota stipulating that migrants must make up at least 15 per cent of all party bodies. The Bundestag parliamentary group has an above-average number of migrants, particularly German Turks, in its ranks.”

It was therefore only a matter of time before a place was also made, organisationally speaking, for politically oriented Islam within the party. [Especially as the Greens](#) had already set up a working group on this issue.

The [SPD Yearbook 2013–2014](#) states the following on this matter (p. 74):

“In 2013, preparations for the establishment of a working group were made during several meetings with various discussion partners. The initiative came largely from *Sawsan Chebli*, who was appointed deputy press spokesperson for the Foreign Office shortly before the group was founded (and therefore declined a role as spokesperson). *Aydan Özoğuz* assumed political patronage for the party executive.”

On 14 December 2014, the “Working Group of Muslim Social Democrats (AMKS)” was founded in Berlin. The meeting was closed to the public, and the press were not admitted either. *Islamiq* wrote: [“The SPD as a political home for Muslims?”](#)

“According to various participants, the founding took place amidst controversial debates and discussions. With a twinkle in her eye, SPD Deputy Chair *Aydan Özoğuz* remarked that she had rarely witnessed such a ‘peaceful’ founding of a working group. [...] The SPD deputy chair congratulated the AKMS on its formation. *Özoğuz* publicly introduced the new spokespersons – *Tuba Itik* (religious education teacher), *Atilla Ülger* (SPD politician in Duisburg), *Lydia Nofal* (contributor to the juma project), *Mohammed Ibrahim* and *Selma Yilmaz-Ilkhan* – for the first time. [...] No high-ranking representatives of Muslim religious communities or organisations were present either at the launch or at the follow-up event. A few local representatives and dialogue officers from various Muslim organisations in Berlin attended in their capacity as SPD members. The organisations appear to have shown no interest in the launch of the first working group of this kind.

Furthermore, the expected and announced welcome speech by party leader Sigmar Gabriel did not take place. No information has emerged regarding the reasons for his absence. It is alleged that over 1,500 invitations were sent out to SPD members across Germany for the launch of the AKMS. Given this figure, however, the event appeared to be poorly attended. Some seats remained empty.”

In 2017, the **Tagesspiegel** reported [“SPD in close contact with Salafists”](#). *Mohamed Ibrahim* (who is accused of anti-Semitism) and *Faten El-Dabbas* are named specifically. The report states:

“*El-Dabbas* has also appeared in the past at events organised by the German Youth for Palestine. According to information from the Berlin Senate Department of the Interior, the organisation has close ties to the terrorist group Hamas.

However, such involvement did not prevent the SPD from inviting *El-Dabbas* to speak. In 2015, for instance, she appeared at an SPD event attended by the then party leader Gabriel and Family Minister Manuela Schwesig. In June 2016, she was a guest at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which has close ties to the SPD. A year later, she was invited to speak at the conference of the Social Democratic Group in the European Parliament on ‘success stories of Muslims in Europe’.

At that time, *El-Dabbas* was working in the press and public relations department of the Federal Foreign Office and was therefore likely in close contact with *Sawsan Chebli*, who was appointed deputy press spokesperson in 2014 by the then Federal Foreign Minister

Frank-Walter Steinmeier. However, she is likely to have met *Chebli* before that, as she was also active in the JUMA association, which *Chebli* supported.”

The response appears to remain rather subdued, as photos from the [AKMS annual conferences](#) show around 14 participants in 2016, around 30 in 2017 and around 20 in 2019.

The fact that these party memberships are not only beneficial to the association (e.g. funding, invitations) but also extend into participants’ private lives is illustrated by *Mohammad Hajjaj’s* account (in the interview: ‘[The Tolerated](#)’) of how his access to higher education was resolved:

‘For us children, the first real problem arose when my older brother and I had finished our A-levels. Because with our temporary residence status [for the family, CF], we weren’t allowed to study. Our documents explicitly stated: ‘Admission to higher education not permitted’. As a result, all the universities we applied to rejected us. We were both quite good at school and eventually managed to persuade the Immigration Authority to lift this ban for us. Friends also spoke up for us, for example Raed Saleh [also Palestinian and, since December 2011, chairman of the SPD parliamentary group, CF], who was already sitting in the House of Representatives for the SPD at the time. Then, at some point, the ban on our temporary residence permits was simply crossed out.

- Participation by *Frank-Walter Steinmeier* (SPD), as SPD parliamentary group leader in the Bundestag (June 2013), in the ‘[Food for Orphans](#)’ fundraising campaign organised by Islamic Relief. As Federal President (10 May 2017), [he attended and addressed the Iftar dinner organised by the JUMA initiative](#) at the Rotes Rathaus in Berlin.

5 February 2020: [Meeting between the ZDM and the SPD leadership](#) at the Willy Brandt House: ‘High-level talks at the Willy Brandt House: ZMD & SPD. Chair Saskia Esken and Norbert-Walter Borjahn, spokesperson Birga Inter and ZMD Chair Aiman Mazyek, ZMD Berlin Mohamad Hajjaj. Topics included Islamophobia, imam training, Bundeswehr chaplaincy and #MeToo.”

9.2. ZDM (Central Council of Muslims) Berlin Regional Association

The Managing Director of Inssan, *Mohamad Hajjaj*, is Chair of the ZDM – Berlin (as a board member of the Teiba Cultural Centre), and Inssan Chair *Lydia Nofal* is his deputy. In these capacities, they were members of the commission tasked with establishing an Institute for Islamic Theology at Humboldt University. Political scientist *Nofal* sits on the expert advisory board on behalf of the ZDM. This high-level representation of the ZDM in Berlin once again highlights Inssan’s close ties – as described at the outset – to organisations associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. And the ‘[Islamic Charter](#)’ published by the ZDM in February 2002 – the year in which discussions on the founding of Inssan e.V. took place – forms the very foundation of Inssan in terms of its subject matter and [underlying issues](#). Its principles are: 1. Islam is the religion of peace, 2. We believe in the merciful God, 3. We believe in the merciful God, 4. The Qur’an is the verbal revelation of God (“Muslims believe that God has repeatedly revealed Himself through prophets, most recently in the 7th century of the Western calendar to Muhammad, the ‘Seal of the Prophets’. This revelation is found as the unaltered Word of God in the Qur’an, which was explained by Muhammad. His sayings and conduct are recorded in the so-called Sunnah. Together, they form the basis of the Islamic faith, Islamic law and the Islamic way of life.”), [...] 15. The development of a distinct Muslim identity in Europe is necessary, [...] 19. Integration whilst preserving Islamic identity, 20. A dignified way of life at the heart of society:

- the introduction of German-language Islamic religious education,
- establishment of academic chairs for the training of Islamic religious education teachers and prayer leaders (imams),
- Approval of the construction of inner-city mosques,
- Permission for the call to prayer amplified by loudspeakers,
- Respect for Islamic dress codes in schools and public authorities,
- Involvement of Muslims in media regulatory bodies,
- Implementation of the Federal Constitutional Court’s ruling on ritual slaughter,
- Employment of Muslim military counsellors,

- Muslim pastoral care in medical and social care facilities,
- State protection of the two Islamic public holidays,
- Establishment of Muslim cemeteries and burial plots.

The links and interconnections between INSSAN, ZDM and Paritätischer were also evident in Berlin in 2016.

9.3. 'Hand in Hand' Action Alliance – Human chain against racism and for diversity.

"A broad alliance of nearly 40 aid organisations, associations and religious institutions is calling on people in five German cities this weekend (18–19 June) to form human chains as a symbol of diverse and tolerant coexistence in Germany. 'Racism is hostile to humanity,' said Markus Dröge, Bishop of the Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia, at the launch of the planned 'Hand in Hand against Racism' campaign on Tuesday (14 June 2016) in Berlin. (Photo, from left: *Bishop Markus Dröge*, Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia; *Mohamad Hajjaj*, Central Council of Muslims in Germany; *Andrea Berg*, Amnesty International in Germany; *Annelie Buntenbach*, Executive Board member of the German Trade Union Confederation; *Barbara John*, Chair of the Executive Board of the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband Berlin)."

9.4. *Barbara John*, listed as a member of the Inssan Advisory Board from 2003 to October 2017 (following the relaunch of the website, the Advisory Board is no longer mentioned), had at the time (2003) praised in the **Tagesspiegel**

"Inssan's independence from religion, groups and institutions". Her career progressed:

- In October 2007, *Dr Barbara John* was elected [Chair of the Advisory Board of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency](#);
- and in January 2020, now *Prof. Barbara John*, she was unanimously [re-elected to this post](#).

"*Prof. Barbara John* is Chair of the Executive Board of PARITÄTISCH Berlin and a member of the Association Council of the PARITÄTISCHER Gesamtverband", a position she has held since 2003.

- In February 2014, Inssan e.V. was given a ["warm welcome" to Paritätische Berlin](#).

[Since then, the description of Inssan e.V. has been:](#) "It is a member of the Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband and is thus recognised as a provider of social projects." In other formulations, Inssan itself states: "... and is thus recognised as a provider of independent youth welfare services."

The basis for this is the 'Wegweiser: Mentors for Refugees' project. And through this project, Inssan – operating under the umbrella of Paritätischer Berlin – is taking further steps towards establishing and embedding itself.

- Inssan will be taking part in the conference organised by the BAGFW (Federal Association of Independent Welfare Organisations, comprising the six leading welfare organisations) on the theme 'This is how we do it: workshops and conference on engagement for and with refugees', to be held on 17–18 October 2016 in Berlin. Five projects were presented: projects by Diakonie, Caritas, AWO and the German Red Cross (DRK), as well as the first project (on behalf of the Paritätische) entitled 'Wegweiser: Mentors for Refugees'.

9.5. 'Anti-racism conference'. On 1 March 2019, the DIE LINKE parliamentary group in the Bundestag organised an 'anti-racism conference: "Solidarity is indivisible"'. In the run-up to the event, [Terre des Femmes](#) had criticised two of the speakers [in an open letter](#).

'[...] It is, however, questionable to organise an anti-racism conference with representatives of fundamentalist groups and to offer these individuals a platform under the guise of solidarity.

The Ahmadiyya group, represented by Khola Maryam Hübsch, daughter of Hadayatulla Hübsch, is an ultra-orthodox and fundamentalist organisation, as evidenced by its view of women. The Ahmadiyya's public image as a cosmopolitan and democratic community in no way reflects the highly concerning, religiously motivated gender apartheid practised by the group. [...] The Islamism practised by the Ahmadiyya may appear 'modern' in its political communication and may even incorporate elements of the women's movement. However, in terms of its interpretations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and in its definition of women's rights, it is anything but liberal.

As a women's rights organisation, reading these passages on the Ahmadiyya's website compels us to protest, and we are concerned that the achievements of the last century by and for women are being trampled underfoot. Inviting a representative of the Ahmadiyya to an anti-racism conference amounts to contributing to the spread of an anti-democratic and thus fascist ideology.

The participation of Inssan e.V. also appears questionable. Inviting an organisation that has long been under observation by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution and is closely associated with the Muslim Brotherhood to speak on the topic of 'anti-discrimination work in everyday life' leaves us shaking our heads in disbelief.

The Left stands for values such as self-determination, democracy and emancipation. The party manifesto speaks of overcoming social conditions in which people are disenfranchised and deprived of their rights. We find ourselves wondering at this point whether you give any thought whatsoever to which figures are given the opportunity at your events to propagate views that are entirely at odds with the values of your own party."

The [response from the DIE LINKE parliamentary group](#) in the Bundestag primarily cites legitimising formalities:

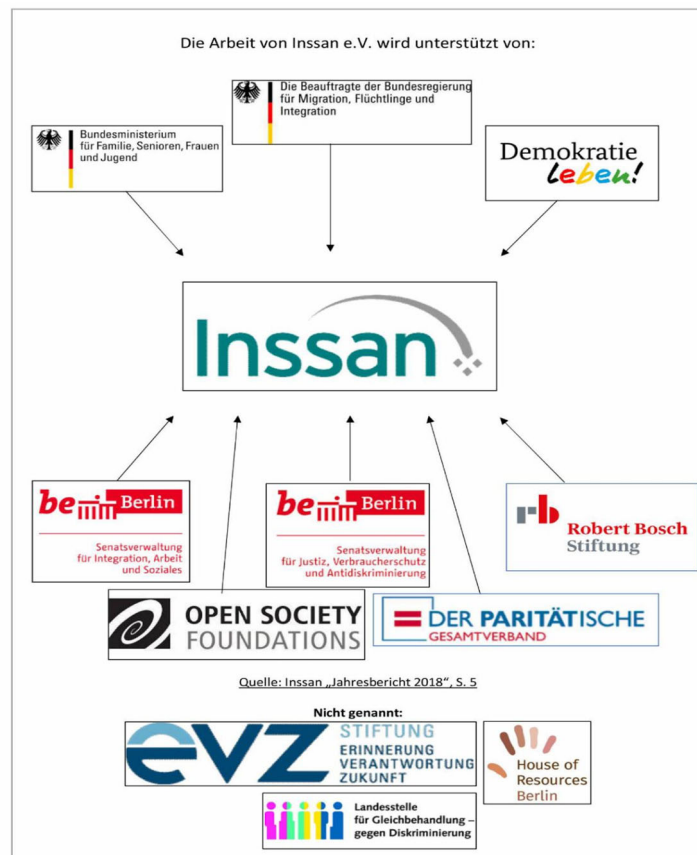
"You are now criticising the invitation of a woman who is active in the Ahmadiyya community and a woman who works for the Islamic, intercultural association Inssan e. V., which campaigns against discrimination. We do not endorse your sweeping criticism of the Ahmadiyya community and the association Inssan e.V., particularly not the suggestion that they are aligned with fascist ideology.

The Ahmadiyya community is a religious community recognised as a body under public law. Inssan e.V. is funded by the Berlin Senate and is a recognised organisation working to combat discrimination."

On 5 September 2019, Inssan announced [a further partnership](#):

"It is gratifying that Inssan's successful collaboration with the HoR [House of Resources Berlin] has led to a long-term partnership [2019–2022], and we are delighted to be able to continue supporting Berliners committed to integration and participation through our joint initiatives. The House of Resources Berlin has been in existence since 2016. Project funding from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community has now been extended by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees until 2022."

And in spring 2020, the Inssan website states under '[Supporters/Sponsors](#)': 'Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration / Federal programme 'Demokratie leben' / Berlin Senate Commissioner for Integration, Work and Social Affairs / State Office for Equal Treatment – Against Discrimination / Open Society Foundation.'



In its 2018 annual report, Inssan e.V. lists organisations with which it 'collaborated' between 2016 and 2018. Seventeen organisations are listed, so Inssan is well connected. What seems more remarkable, however, are the organisations with which there was also collaboration – including personal 'overlaps' – but which are not named: these include Islamic Relief, the Islamic Federation, JUMA, the Milli Görüş Islamic Community and the Teiba Cultural Centre.



Furthermore, Inssan has evolved into a sort of official rapporteur on Muslim life in Berlin. Whilst Inssan member and CLAIM director *Dr Nina Mühe* had already compiled the report 'Muslims in Berlin' – funded by the Open Society Foundation – between 2008 and 2010, in 2018 she was also a key co-author of the favourable report on 'Islamic Life in Berlin', funded by the Senate Department for Europe.

10. Cui Bono

The question of 'Cui bono' ('Who benefits?') also seems pertinent in relation to this lobbying. As the old saying goes: 'No money, no honey!'.

The Protestant Academy Loccum remains active and thus useful. From 14 to 16 December 2018, there will be a 'workshop' on the topic: '[Mosques in Germany](#)'. Subtitle: 'Where might developments lead?' *Lydia Nofal* will be attending as a representative of the RAA and deputy chair of the ZMD Berlin. She will speak in the session 'Where should we be heading? Factors for success to date and pressing challenges' on the topic: 'Funding for mosque communities'.

The managing director of Inssan e.V. (in December 2018) also expressed these views and many more regarding

[the re-establishment of the Islam Forum in Berlin](#):

"The question remains as to how important a state treaty, such as the one Hamburg concluded in 2012, would actually be for Berlin. The ethnologist and Islamic studies scholar Nina Mühe, who organises the Islam Forum as a representative of the Muslim community alongside the Commissioner for Integration, says: 'A state treaty would, above all, be a symbol of recognition.' After all, many of the practical matters regulated by the Hamburg state treaty, for example, have long been a reality in Berlin. Mühe refers in particular to the possibility of burials in accordance with Islamic rites, the provisions regarding Islamic public holidays in the Schools Act, the aforementioned prison chaplaincy, and the Institute for Islamic Theology at Humboldt University, which was founded this year.

Still a long way off Nevertheless, Hajjaj argues: 'A state treaty is not merely symbolic; it also brings significant financial benefits.' This is also demonstrated by Berlin's state treaty with the Jewish communities – the Senate should take this as a model."

The 'significant financial benefits' arising from the [State Treaty between the State of Berlin and the Jewish Community](#) (dated 1993) can be clarified. Article 6 provides for DM 9.8 million in staff subsidies, alongside adjustments in line with pay rises in the public sector. Under Article 7, there are state grants to the pension fund; under Article 8, grants for religious education; under Article 9, further state grants for cultural work, cemeteries and other purposes; and under Article 10, grants for construction projects.

These amounts were subsequently converted into euros, and following a dispute in 2013 over whether the Jewish Community had fulfilled all its formal obligations (including the business plan), the matter went to court; [in 2016, the Higher Administrative Court ruled](#) in favour of the Jewish Community on key points:

"The Higher Administrative Court has now essentially upheld the decision of the Administrative Court and ordered the State of Berlin to grant the Jewish Community basic funding of 6.469 million euros for the year 2013 and 6.673 million euros for the year 2014. These claims arise directly from the provisions of the State Treaty, both in terms of their basis and their amount. The court did not accept the State of Berlin's view that the payments were subject to general budgetary provisions. The court rejected further claims for payment totalling around 2.4 million euros asserted by the Jewish Community."

These are truly significant financial benefits, and when you factor in how many Jewish citizens live in Berlin and how many Muslims... it all adds up. And the Inssan managing director is not alone in his view. Inssan's chairwoman, *Lydia Nofal*, has even more far-reaching ideas, wishes and demands. At a conference organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on the funding of Muslim organisations, she called in her speech "Establishment of an Islamic Foundation in Berlin for the transparent funding of Islamic life", she called for something akin to comprehensive funding:

"To date, there is still a lack of adequate core funding for Muslim religious life in Berlin. This concerns the construction and maintenance of mosques, the funding of imams, religious and social services, but also, for example, the funding of the religious community's own contribution towards

paying Muslim religious teachers in Berlin's schools. And last but not least, there is a lack of funding for urgently needed public relations work – particularly in view of the recurring public debates on Islam-related issues.”²³

She then focuses on the establishment of an Islamic foundation, but does not explain why the Islamic associations in Berlin do not simply set up such a foundation. There would be nothing to prevent them from doing so. But instead: a demand on the state?

Her text concludes with a prediction that could also be interpreted as a threat:

“This article is intended as a contribution to the discussion on how the financing of Islamic life in Berlin can be made possible in future. Criticism and additional comments are welcome. For the question of the future financing of Islamic life in Berlin is one that concerns us all – whether Muslim or not. Because the social consequences that will arise if we fail to tackle these problems will affect us all equally.”

If one considers it objectively from the perspective of ‘Who benefits?’, the aim is to create and secure jobs for Muslims within a Muslim sub-sector in Germany. In this respect, the original ‘Arbeitskreis Berliner Muslime’ (ABM) could also be described as a job-creation scheme.

Although Inssan e.V. itself is one of the influential and well-connected players, it is one of the smaller organisations in terms of both staff and funding. Three organisations may serve to illustrate this. All three are active in a similar field; all three are also headquartered in Berlin; and all three – like Inssan – are recognised providers of independent youth welfare services. All three have joined the Initiative for a Transparent Civil Society (ITZ), meaning that their staff numbers and funding details are publicly available.

- [Aktion Courage](#), founded in 1992, defines its mission as follows:

“Aktion Courage e.V. advocates for and promotes the social participation and political involvement of people of non-German origin. [...] We are an alliance of committed citizens and organisations from diverse cultures and backgrounds, representing all regions of the world, here in Germany.

We do not look the other way. Discrimination of any kind is an attack on human dignity. That is why we take courageous action to combat violent and overt racism, as well as subtle and everyday racism in the workplace and in public offices, in schools and universities, in leisure and private life, in politics and the media.”

The current project is called ‘Schools without Racism – Schools with Courage’. By the end of 2019, 15 full-time staff members and more than 50 freelance staff were employed for this project. In the 2018 financial year, a total of 998,120.98 was received from “membership fees/grants/other non-taxable income” and a further 103,098.64 from “donations”, making a total of 1,101,219.62 euros.

- According to its own description, [ufuq e.V.](#) is

‘a recognised provider of independent youth welfare services and is active in political education and prevention work on the topics of Islam, Islamophobia and Islamism. Through our programmes, we act as a nationwide point of contact for educators, teachers and staff at public authorities. [...]

Our organisation's name says it all: ‘ufuq’ is Arabic and means ‘horizon’. When it comes to all the questions and conflicts that may arise in everyday life, at school, in the workplace or in politics regarding the ‘integration of Islam’, our focus is no longer on whether this is taking place, but on how this process is shaped.

‘How do we want to live?’ is therefore one of our guiding questions. We are interested in the lived experiences of young people themselves: what interests and aspirations do young Muslims have? How do they view themselves and others? What experiences do they have and how do they practise their faith – if it is important to them at all?”

At the end of 2018, ufuq e.V. had 25 employees subject to social security contributions and, according to [its 2017 annual report](#), total revenue of 1,301,547.14 euros, of which 610,432.72 was spent on wages and salaries – that is, 24,147 per employee.

- [RAA Berlin](#) (Regional Centres for Education, Integration and Democracy e.V.) describes itself in its mission statement as an organiser of participatory projects in schools, school communities and local authorities:

“RAA Berlin runs and supports anti-discrimination participation projects in schools, school communities and local authorities. Since 1991, we have been supporting school development processes and local community initiatives, advising nursery and school staff as well as parents, community organisations and local authorities, developing resources and delivering training courses.

We support everyone involved in the educational process with tailored services. These include, amongst other things, diversity-focused organisational development, bilingual language support programmes, free tuition, youth work in schools, school mediation, parent groups and educational learning workshops. As a non-profit association, a provider of independent youth welfare services and a school development workshop, we are funded by foundations, public funds and donations.”

RAA e.V. originally stood for “Regional Office for Foreigners’ Issues, Youth Work and Schools e.V.” and was [founded](#) in Berlin [in 1991](#) by Anetta Kabane, the first and, at the same time, last Commissioner for Foreigners of the East Berlin City Council.

According to information on [the staffing structure](#), in 2016 “50 full-time employees were employed, along with 1 part-time employee. The number of freelance staff in 2016 stood at 160.” According to [the profit and loss account for 2016](#), RAA Berlin received a total of 2,223,369.55 euros in funding, of which 1,567,978.07 was allocated to staff costs, amounting to an average of 31,360 euros per full-time employee.

A comparison of these three organisations with Inssan reveals two differences: all three focus on schools and young people, which Inssan does not, and at Ufuq – an organisation very closely aligned with Inssan e.V. in terms of its mission – only one of the twelve female staff members pictured wears a headscarf.

But that may well change for Inssan. Inssan’s chair, *Lydia Nofal*, is employed full-time at RAA Berlin, where she is the project coordinator for JUMA and, from 2015 to 2019, led the RAA project ‘[Extremely Democratic – Strengthening Muslim Youth Work](#)’ together with her JUMA colleague Kofi Ohen-Dokyi. The project is funded by the BMFSFJ’s ‘Living Democracy’ programme in the area of extremism prevention, and by the state programme ‘Democracy. Diversity. Respect’ run by the Berlin Senate Department for Justice, Consumer Protection and Anti-Discrimination. The [final report](#) lists the Muslim youth organisations in Germany that are (or are to be) funded:

“Muslim Youth in Germany (MJD), Die Datteltäter, JUMA – Young, Muslim, Active, Muslim Youth Organisation (MJW), Committed Muslims in Germany (EMD), Youth Work at the German Islamic Academy (DIA), Council of Muslim Students & Academics (RAMSA), Federation of Muslim Youth (BDMJ), Islamic Youth in Bavaria (IJB), Youth Organisation of the Central Council of Muslims (MuJu), Zahnräder Network, Intercultural Institute for Inclusion, Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Organisation.”

And in the final conference documentation, ‘[Muslim Youth Work on the Path to Recognition](#)’, the (financial) demands are already set out:

1. Muslim youth work needs more public funding and, to that end, greater social acceptance. The CLAIM Alliance serves as a model.
2. How can we ensure that Muslim youth work receives long-term structural support and funding? Make expertise accessible, set up a coordination centre, carry out lobbying work, secure access to youth welfare funds, and establish a foundation for Muslim youth work.

However, it appears that Inssan is thematically ‘too narrowly focused’ – on Islam and Muslims – to be able to tap into the ‘bigger pots’ of funding. There is already a federal anti-discrimination body as well as one for the State of Berlin, so why another one specifically for Muslims?

Furthermore, the projects remain ‘modest’ in terms of participant numbers, and it is becoming apparent that they are ‘Muslims’ – let alone the wider society.

Barbara John (Chair of the Paritätische and member of the Inssan Advisory Board) addressed this general concern (as early as 2007) in her article [‘Cultural adaptation among Muslim young people in Germany whilst preserving religious identity’](#): ‘Islam: more culture or more religion?’

‘We non-Muslims have conjured up the image that “imported” Islam and the culture of origin go together like chalk and cheese. One cannot exist without the other. That is why belly dancing and devout Muslim chants at an event do not constitute any contradiction. However, we do view it – albeit with satisfaction, but also as downright rebellious towards the religion or culture of origin – when Muslim girls play football, swim in bikinis or wear both a headscarf and tight-fitting trousers. For many, this simply does not add up. They ask questions such as: Why do they still cling to the religion of their immigrant heritage when they already dress and behave like modern Christian women or non-religious young women?’

Trapped in this static way of thinking, many people – including politicians – fail to see how many young Muslims are currently distancing themselves from, or indeed freeing themselves from, their culture of origin, but not from their religion. On the contrary: they are seeking recognition as Muslims within the local, German culture, because their religiosity has long since become detached from the cultural framework they still encountered with their grandparents or parents. Their faith has outgrown its roots in their culture of origin. What is lacking, however, is a sense of belonging within German or European culture.”

Does this ‘taking root’ then take place according to the principle of [‘Yo, Allah!’](#)? The motto: ‘Being cool and religious is no contradiction. Young Muslims live by the Qur’an – and listen to rap.’

“Germany’s young Muslims, however, differ from the older generation: they wear designer clothes, listen to rap music, want to pursue careers and be recognised as part of society. They are a youth movement and live the Islamic ‘lifestyle’.” The ‘pop Muslims’ have superstars whom the German public is unaware of. Take Sami Yusuf, for example. This Englishman has already sold millions of CDs worldwide with his Quran-compatible ballads. Rehab and Ugur know his songs, as do most young Muslims in Germany.

With rapper-style gestures and praises to God spoken over beats, the two German-Turks from ‘YaHu’ have also made their voices heard. And there are female rappers wearing fashionable headscarves, such as ‘Lady Scar’. On the internet, young Muslims chat on Islamic portals such as ‘Vaybee!’ or ‘waymo.de’ – a mix of YouTube and StudiVZ. They also find suitable streetwear online, from fashion labels such as ‘styleislam.de’ or ‘muslim-shirt.de’. There, you can order tops with your own name in Arabic calligraphy.

‘Why should these young people wear a T-shirt that says “New York” or “Manhattan”?’ asks Hakan Tosuner from Berlin. ‘Many prefer to wear something they can relate to.’ He is a member of the association

‘Muslim Youth Germany’, where many embrace the ‘Islamstyle’.

But fashion and pop culture alone do not define young Muslims – for them, Islam is a way of life: they’d rather go to Qur’an classes than to the disco. Drugs, sex and material excesses are taboo for them. They pray and fast. Hakan Tosuner explains the growing number of practising young Muslims by pointing out that, in recent years, Islamic organisations have created opportunities for young people that did not exist before. This also includes a new generation of imams: preachers who cater to the needs of young German Muslims.”

This is in line with what the JUMA chairman, [Dennis Kirschbaum](#), says (see p. 10): “We have many goals, but one must not be forgotten: we want to have fun!”

Muslim youth and JUMA: Islamic entertainment clubs?

It therefore seems appropriate to evaluate the projects run by independent youth welfare organisations as well – to examine what takes place there and whether they are actually carrying out work that promotes integration.

11. Empowerment

A key term that is used time and again is ‘empowerment’, [meaning](#) ‘the granting of authority, the transfer of responsibility’ or ‘self-competence’.

[Lydia Nofal](#) (2011) said the following on this subject at the [11th Berlin Prevention Day](#) (p. 93)

‘Those affected needed to be empowered. They should see themselves as citizens of this state, know that they have rights, and fight to enforce these rights and go to court if there were any obstacles. Empowerment – that is what it is all about.’

The extent to which ‘taking legal action’ can be realised by the young people in question is questionable and would likely require support, which, however, would contradict the concept of ‘self-competence’. This constant emphasis on empowerment also contradicts the fact that – as in the ‘Network against Discrimination and Islamophobia’ project – Muslims are consistently portrayed as victims.

Furthermore, if one considers the context in which empowerment is mentioned, for example at JUMA:

‘Islam as part of one’s identity’ and the human-centred interpretation of the Qur’an espoused by the Teiba Mosque (Imam Ferid Heider): ‘The Qur’an is the Word of God, transmitted to us in its entirety. Not only have the words of the Qur’an reached us without error, but even the pronunciation of every word and every letter has been preserved for us,’ then is this not primarily youth welfare but rather Islamic empowerment = religious proselytising? The financial support of proselytising is not one of the state’s responsibilities in Germany.

This ‘empowerment’ – the reinforcement and assertion of Muslim views and claims – is so pervasive, even in the Inssan projects, that one must ask whether, for example, the ‘headscarf’ can serve as a ‘[barometer of tolerance and religious freedom](#)’, and what the situation is regarding Muslim organisations’ willingness to engage in dialogue?

‘However, a serious dialogue strategy on the part of a religious minority, aimed at integration, would also have to ask, in a self-critical manner, why certain religious and cultural practices lead to alienation and resistance within the majority society, and seek ways to anchor its own “religious identity” in society in a socially acceptable manner. This is simply a matter of political wisdom, if conflicts are not to be dragged out or politicised and, where applicable, become ammunition for right-wing populist movements. The strategy adopted by Muslim

‘umbrella organisations’ to enforce their positions through court rulings is counterproductive unless it is accompanied by a broad inter-religious, intercultural and political discourse on these issues. [...]

What actually drives the ‘umbrella organisations’ to elevate the headscarf to the central symbol of acceptance for their religious community and the yardstick for tolerance and religious freedom? Why are newly built mosques in Christian neighbourhoods provocatively named ‘Fatih’ (= Conqueror) mosques? What is the point of insisting on the muezzin’s call to prayer amplified by loudspeakers? What is taking place here is, on the one hand, a struggle for assertion and a quest for dominance within the intra-Islamic battle over interpretation (who has the

‘correct’ interpretation of the Qur’an and Sunnah?), whilst on the other hand it is about the politicisation of cultural differences – that is, a ‘cultural identity politics’ which is quite obviously aimed at securing group-based privileges and directed against the primacy and the principle of equality enshrined in the secular legal order.”

This assessment is borne out by the ‘reversal of perpetrator and victim’ that is observed time and again. The Inssan network attacks Berlin’s Neutrality Act and seeks to have the state’s neutrality abolished; [then](#), when the Berlin Senate makes the move to entrust the liberal Muslim lawyer Seyran Ateş with its defence, [it writes](#): ‘By appointing Ms Ateş as its official representative, the education authority has staged a political battle.’

12. Do ut des

An old principle of politics is ‘Do ut des’ (‘I give so that you may give’ or ‘One hand washes the other’ – innocently).

In Berlin, it was decided to construct a new concrete building complex on the site of the former palace in Berlin-Mitte – on which the GDR government had erected the ‘Palace of the Republic’ following the demolition of the palace, which in turn was also demolished after German reunification – clad in a faux Baroque façade. A particular point of debate was whether or not this new building should feature a Christian dome cross. The Humboldt Forum Foundation [took up](#) this [issue](#) and “various figures from the worlds of politics, culture and academia were asked for their [views on the cross](#) at the Humboldt Forum.”

Among those consulted was Aiman Mazyek (Chair of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany), who takes a positive view:

“The cross on the dome is part of our cultural and historical heritage, and I do not find it disturbing in any way, especially as this context should not be obscured or compulsively abolished. Anyone wishing to represent the equality of religions through future secular buildings can incorporate a symbol that unites, for example, all three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.”

Seyran Ates (lawyer, initiator and co-founder of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin) expresses a similarly supportive view; she has established her liberal mosque on the upper floor of a Christian church, and her work is supported, amongst others, by the ZEIT Foundation:

“I am a supporter of the Humboldt Forum, and as a liberal mosque community we are grateful to be allowed to curate a display case within the Forum. Through this and much more that is happening and will happen in the building, the Forum demonstrates how open it is to the diversity of our social reality. I welcome the complete reconstruction of the dome with the cross. Anything else would contradict the overall concept of the Humboldt Forum and would amount to self-censorship that would be neither appropriate nor honest. To omit the cross, in the interests of a religiously multicultural society, would be tantamount to a denial of the history of the site and the building. An awareness of our own history, with all its contradictions, should always take precedence over false deference. The dome and the cross, which is inseparable from it, are not the place where contemporary history is written or claims to power are asserted. The dome, with its cross and inscription, is simply a meticulous and honest reconstruction. It deserves precisely this respect. Nothing more. With its open-concept approach, the Humboldt Forum will undoubtedly enrich Europe’s culture of debate. The city of contradictions can be proud of this.”

13. Conclusion

1. From a lobbying perspective, the success of Inssan e.V. is impressive. Over the years, it has demonstrated persistent efforts to overcome resistance. First, the classification by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution as having links to the Muslim Brotherhood / Milli Görüs must be set aside – for which academic evidence is helpful – then respect is earned through numerous ‘modern’ initiatives (against forced marriage, blood donation, litter picking, etc.), then identified its first cause (‘anti-racism’), followed by its second (‘refugee aid’), and forged close ties with various recognised organisations that receive state funding; as a result, the organisation is now a ‘recognised provider’.

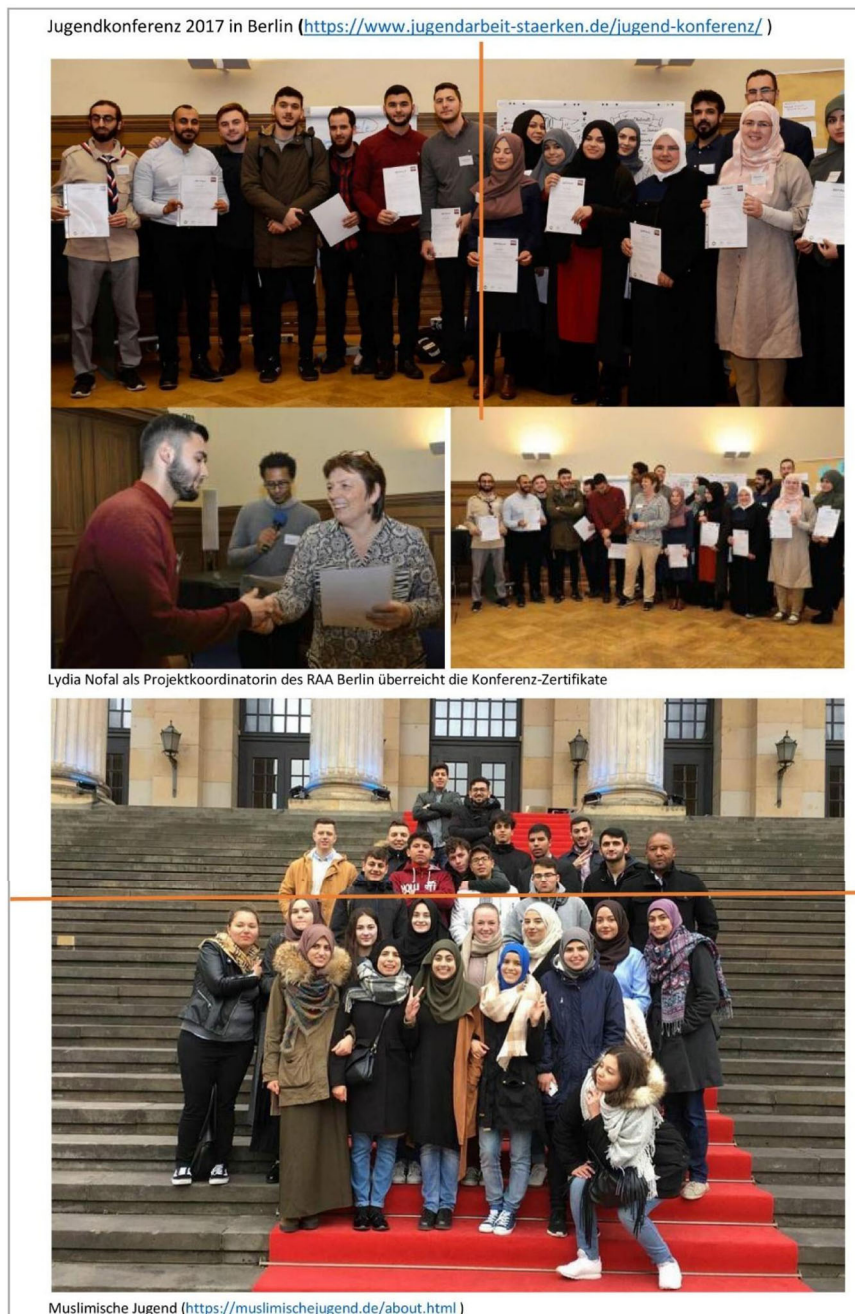
In hindsight, one could analyse and document these various aspects as if from a textbook. It would show that the intentions of a lobbying organisation are only one side of the coin, whilst support and authorisation from the relevant authorities constitute the necessary other side. In this respect, the success of Islamic lobbying is not ‘strong’ in its own right but must also be viewed as a desired component of the religious lobbying carried out by the two major churches in Germany as a whole (see Appendix 10 – Peace rally).

2. However, when viewed in terms of the actual success in reaching and working with young people, the success appears rather marginal. Participation figures – where they are mentioned at all – are in the low double figures. However, in the age of the internet, this is of little significance. Professionally designed websites convey a magnificent impression and reinforce the desired political effect: the image of a ‘colourful Germany’ in which ‘democracy thrives!’
3. In the ‘[Guideline on Areas of Cooperation with Islamic Associations in the Neighbourhood](#)’, published by the Senate Department for Integration, Labour and Social Affairs, on behalf of the Berlin Senate Commissioner for Integration and Migration (2007) – which was drawn up on the basis of discussions at the Islamforum Berlin – the following is stated unequivocally (page 10) regarding cooperation between the state and associations:

“Clear grounds for exclusion from any form of cooperation or financial support are the glorification of violence, the questioning of the separation of state and religion, and the rejection of our constitution (e.g. democracy, gender equality, non-violence, and the violation of human rights).”

It follows from this that Inssan's claim and demand on the state regarding the failure to observe the separation of state and religion is derived from Sharia law (the unity of religion and state). This is evident in the contribution by Inssan chairwoman *Lydia Nofal* to a thematic volume by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on the funding of Muslim organisations ²⁴. Such full funding would not only be unconstitutional but also unrealistic, as no other religious community or church in Germany receives even a fraction of such funding.

4. Judging by the reports and photographs of Inssan's projects and project partners, which reveal gender segregation and a clear hierarchy with men at the top and women at the bottom, the actual respect for fundamental rights, such as gender equality, appears at the very least questionable.



However, the Muslim associations are safely sheltered in the ‘wake’ of the Catholic Church, to which the Federal Constitutional Court ([judgement of September 2003, para. 124](#)) grants the following:

‘In this regard, the Basic Law — within the sphere of society — also respects those religious and ideological views which reflect a relationship between the sexes that is difficult to reconcile with the constitutional order of values, provided they do not transgress the limits of the state’s peace and legal order.’

5. Inssan is successful in its focus on formal criteria (including a verbal commitment to the Basic Law), as cultural and social policy pays attention only to precisely these formalities. If the word ‘democracy’ is written on an organisation’s door, nobody looks behind it. As the relevant official in the cultural administration once put it succinctly: ‘We are not the Inquisition.’

If the state administration were also to examine content, the largest religious community in Germany, the Roman Catholic Church, would lose its state recognition (with all the consequences that entails), as it too fails to recognise a central element of our constitution – the equality of all people and thus also equal opportunities for women and men – and grants women only subservient roles.

This formal interpretation also means that contradictory things are happening in Berlin. For instance, the imam of the Cologne Community Centre / Dar al-Salam Mosque, Mohammed Taher Sabri, was awarded the Order of Merit of the State of Berlin by the Governing Mayor in 2015 – for the mosque community’s dedicated refugee aid – and was described as ‘Islamist’ in the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution’s annual report that same year.

Two specific situations particularly illustrate the multi-dimensional nature of the relationship between the state and Islam in Berlin.

6. The controversial establishment of an Institute for Islamic Theology at Humboldt University in Berlin features a particular element in the composition of its advisory board, which has, or will have, a fundamental influence on the institute’s theological orientation. The advisory board comprises various religious associations, which are required to appoint expert representatives [with ‘proven theological expertise’](#) – in other words, theologians. The Central Council of Muslims, which, as an organisation, has a seat and a vote, nominated its deputy regional chair as the theological expert: *Lydia Nofal*, who holds a degree in political science and is also chair of Inssan e. V.

This can simply be understood to mean that the entire institute is about politics and not about theology.

7. In the current red-red-green coalition government in Berlin, a politician from the ‘multi-culti’ faction of Alliance 90/The Greens has been Senator for Justice since 8 December 2016, *Dirk Behrendt*, who, like the Central Council of Muslims, [regards](#) Berlin’s Neutrality Act as [unconstitutional](#) and wants to allow Muslim female teachers to wear headscarves whilst teaching, even in Berlin’s primary schools. He thus aligns himself with the Network Against Discrimination and Islamophobia (Inssan e.V.) and the [#GegenBerufsverbot alliance](#), which is co-sponsored by Inssan; with their one-dimensional interpretation of the fundamental right to freedom of religion and their refusal to accept the state’s ideological neutrality, these organisations advocate a position that runs counter to the constitution.

The headscarf lawsuits do, however, have the merit of having brought clearer legal contours to the state governments’ slapdash, ‘shirt-sleeved’ approach – as reflected in [the Federal Constitutional Court’s 2003 ruling](#) – with regard to constitutional religious law between 2003 and 2020. Although this was not the intention of the Muslim women who brought the cases, it has clarified what the state’s religious neutrality means in the exercise of sovereign functions. Thus, in January 2020, the constitutional complaint of a trainee lawyer was [dismissed](#); she had been refused permission in Hesse to wear a headscarf whilst on duty as a member of the court.

14. Concluding remarks

1. It would be a challenge to describe in greater detail the network promoting Islam (the 'Claims'), which in Berlin comprises politicians from the SPD and Alliance 90/The Greens, the Robert Bosch and Mercator Foundations, journalists, as well as a manageable number of academics and specialist advisers within the Senate Administration and federal ministries.

2. Once my research was complete, I wrote directly to the chairperson of Inssan e.V. I explained my request for a meeting, introduced myself, described my research, and wrote: 'During my research into Christian lobbying, it was always important to me to speak personally with the key players, and so I was also able to hold background discussions with the heads of the two church offices, Prelate Dr Karl Jüsten and Prelate Dr Martin Dutzmann. Our shared interest was this: the facts must be correct. (Even if our assessments differ.) I would like to clarify this with you, as Chair of the Board of Inssan e.V., and therefore request a meeting.' Response: none.

A letter to the Inssan e.V. secretariat also elicited only the response that I should please send my questions in advance, which I did, including Annexes 1–3. Response: none.

¹ Riem Spielhaus / Alexa Färber (eds.) 'Islamic Community Life in Berlin', commissioned by the Senate Commissioner for Integration and Migration, Berlin, 2006. Page 60.

² Ibid., page 63.

³ As stated (for information) in the expert report by the citizens' initiative against the construction of a mosque at Mierendorffplatz in Berlin-Charlottenburg, 2005.

⁴ Esra Özyürek: "German Muslims – Muslim Germans. Encounters with converts to Islam." Heidelberg: 2017, 176 pages. Page 51.

⁵ Julia Gerlach: "Towards a European Islam – or is this already a reality?", published by the Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh: 2016, 74 pages, page 13.

⁶ Riem Spielhaus / Nina Mühe: "Islamic Community Life in Berlin". Published by the Erlangen Centre for Islam and Law in Europe (EZIRE), 2018, p. 55.

⁷ Claudia Dantschke / Claudia Luzar: 'Aspects of Threats to Democracy in Berlin's Mitte District and Possibilities for Democratic Intervention'. Published by the Centre for Democratic Culture. Berlin, 2007. p. 28.

⁸ Julia Gerlach: 'Helpful Partners: Muslim Communities and Their Commitment to Refugees', published by the Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh, 2017, 92 pages. pp. 27–28. https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/LW_Broschuere_Hilfsbereite_Partner_2017.pdf

⁹ Both judgements are available for download on the website of the Berlin Office for the Protection of the Constitution. <https://www.berlin.de/sen/inneres/verfassungsschutz/publikationen/verfassungsschutzberichte/>

¹⁰ Lidwina Meyer (ed.): 'Law, Religion, Politics. Towards the Recognition of Islam in Germany'. Loccum, 2007, 350 pages.

¹¹ Lydia Nofal: 'Experiences and Positions of the Inssan Association for Cultural Interaction e.V.', in Lidwina Meyer (ed.): 'Law, Religion, Politics: Towards the Recognition of Islam in Germany'. Loccum, 2007, pp. 69–74.

¹² Lidwina Meyer (ed.): "Religions in the City. Opportunities for Urban Coexistence." Loccum, 2006, 178 pages.

¹³ Esra Özyürek: "German Muslims – Muslim Germans. Encounters with converts to Islam." Heidelberg: 2017, 176 pages. p. 56.

¹⁴ Riem Spielhaus / Nina Mühe: "Islamic Community Life in Berlin". Published by the Erlangen Centre for Islam and Law in Europe (EZIRE), 2018, p. 142.

-
- ¹⁵ Bassam Tibi: "Islamic Immigration and its Consequences. The New Anti-Semitism, Security and the 'New Germans'." Stuttgart: 2018, 516 pages, p. 124 ff.
- ¹⁶ Farid Suleiman, "Friday", in: Encyclopaedia of Ecclesiastical and Religious Law, edited by Heribert Hallermann, Thomas Meckel, Michael Droege and Heinrich de Wall, 2019, 2nd ed.
- ¹⁷ Stefan Wild: "Not Every Day Is Friday. Remarks on Friday, Public Holidays and Everyday Life in the Islamic World", in: Everyday Life and Material Culture in Arabic Language and Literature, edited by Thomas Bauer and Ulrike Stehli-Werbeck, Wiesbaden, 2005, pp. 399–409.
- ¹⁸ Esra Özyürek: 'German Muslims – Muslim Germans. Encounters with converts to Islam.' Heidelberg: 2017, 176 pages. p. 50.
- ¹⁹ The decisions of the Higher Administrative Court (OVG) are available from the Decisions Distribution Office (<https://www.berlin.de/gerichte/oberverwaltungsgericht/entscheidungen/entscheidungsversand/>).
- ²⁰ Kristiane Backer: "From MTV to Mecca. How Islam Changed My Life." Berlin, 2009, 331 pages. Pages 68–69.
- ²¹ Esta Özyüre
k, *ibid.*
- ²² Julia Gerlach: 'Helpful Partners: Muslim Communities and Their Commitment to Refugees', published by the Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh, 2017, 92 pages. p. 14.
https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/LW_Broschuere_Hilfsbereite_Partner_2017.pdf
- ²³ Lydia Nofal: 'Establishment of an Islamic Foundation in Berlin for the Transparent Financing of Islamic Life', pp. 44–49 in: Dietmar Molthagen, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Forum Berlin (eds.), 'The Financing of Muslim Organisations in Germany', Berlin: 2018, 63 pages. p. 44 ff.
- ²⁴ Lydia Nofal, *ibid.*

First published (19.06.2020) in German: „Islamischer Lobbyismus“.

<https://fowid.de/meldung/islamischer-lobbyismus>