



Compass 2020

Germany in international relations
Aims, instruments, prospects



Religion and politics

A revived area of conflict

Thomas Meyer



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The Compass 2020 project represents the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's contribution to a debate on Germany's aims, role and strategies in international relations. Compass 2020 will organise events and issue publications in the course of 2007, the year in which German foreign policy will be very much in the limelight due to the country's presidency of the EU Council and the G 8. Some 30 articles written for this project will provide an overview of the topics and regions that are most important for German foreign relations. All the articles will be structured in the same way. Firstly, they will provide information about the most significant developments, the toughest challenges and the key players in the respective political fields and regions. The second section will analyse the role played hitherto by German / European foreign policy, the strategies it pursues and the way in which it is perceived. In the next section, plausible alternative scenarios will be mapped out illustrating the potential development of a political field or region over the next 15 years. The closing section will formulate possible points of departure for German and European policy.

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Abstract

Religions have made a worldwide political come-back. Apart from personal religious faith which respects the democratic rule of law, the politicized religion of fundamentalist claims is undergoing a revival in all cultures and in some places is even making bids for state power. It also serves as an ideological justification for terrorist violence. In this confusing situation great and probably lasting damage has been done by the ideologically inspired thesis of an inevitable clash of civilizations, with which *Samuel P. Huntington* has attempted to reduce the wide variety of new religious and cultural phenomena to a single concept. Huntington's concept is, however, far too crude and empirically unfounded.

In recent decades the world has witnessed quite different facts. They include the basic rights covenants of the United Nations of 1966, which were ratified by numerous countries and represent all the world's major religions, and above all an internal differentiation into various currents and political tendencies to be observed at present in all traditional religious cultures. Empirical research confirms that in all the world's religions there are larger or smaller groups of people who interpret the religious tradition they are committed to in a particular way: namely that peaceful co-existence and active co-operation with other religions is a self-evident duty. They regard the basic social and political values which they associate with their religion as recognizing the equality of all philosophical, cultural and religious identities, so long as they also accept the principle of the mutual recognition of all.¹

With regard to the future relationship between religion and politics there are two contradictory tendencies or options: political co-operation between religious and cultural traditions, on the one hand, and a fundamentalist policy of conflict, on the other. The prospects of success for these two opposing options will be determined by a large and indeterminate number of actors operating in different spheres. They include states and transnational institutions, parties, civil societies, religious communities and, above all, the mass media. Thanks to globalization and the electronic mass media, interaction between the national, regional and global arenas is close and direct.

Holding out the prospect of success in containing the fundamentalist temptation is a policy of recognition that would combine a declaration of the equal value of every religious identity – so long as it shows equal respect for all others – with a commitment to fair access for all to the social and economic resources of world society. Only if we manage to effectively implement at all political levels the fair and equal treatment of members of all religions and cultures through successful educational, social and economic policies, will it prove possible to contain fundamentalism on a lasting basis and turn the renaissance of religion to the advantage of world society. The political come-back of religion requires a co-operative policy of recognition in each individual society, in the various regions, and in the global arena.

1] Martin E. Marty / R. Scott Appleby (eds.): *Fundamentalisms Observed*. Chicago 1991.

I. A renaissance of religions?

I.1 Events and developments

A total of five very different developments in recent years have drawn public attention to the relationship between religion and politics in a new way in many countries of the world – both in the member states of the European Union and in the global arena:

Firstly: The setting up of a modern theocracy in Iran by Islamic fundamentalists led by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 seemed to show that the newly emerging religious fundamentalism was not only making headway in the world, but under certain conditions could successfully bid for political power.

Secondly: The attacks on New York's World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 by Islamist fanatics were a drastic demonstration to the world of the dangers of globalization in the form of a religion-based political terrorism.

Thirdly: Observing this and other events convinced many commentators, politicians and scholars that the religious and cultural factor was in the process of becoming a powerful influence in the political arenas of the globalized world.

Fourthly: Many countries of the world, especially in Europe, are witnessing a revival of religious faith and religion not only in people's private lives, but also in the public sphere.

Fifthly: Isolated, but spectacular acts of violence and rioting by migrants in several European countries, widely believed by sections of the public to be religiously motivated, have reframed the question of the prerequisites and limits of peaceful co-existence between different religious and cultural communities in today's world.

It is clear that religions have made a worldwide political come-back at the beginning of the 21st century in a way that is in some respects surprising. Those most surprised by this rebirth of religion were those who assumed that a linear and one-dimensional worldwide trend towards secularization was an inevitable result of advancing modernization. The associated expectation that religion – not only as a political factor, but also on the personal level – was in steady and irreversible recession worldwide now seems to be refuted by this new development for the time being. The surprise felt by many observers is accompanied by bewilderment, if not downright fears for the future of the modern world.

I.2 Contradictory development

A differentiated look needs to be taken at this new development, however. The ways in which specific religions re-enter the political arena differ considerably, which leads to considerable confusion. Old questions are restated, especially regarding the legitimate role of religions in public life. But new questions also intrude upon us, above all one containing a problem of definition: Where is the line to be drawn between religion as a legitimate part of identity and a politicized religious fundamentalism which claims the systematic violation of universal basic rights as its own paramount religious right?

In recent decades the world has been confronted with an important fact which is often neglected in the current discussions. The basic rights conventions adopted by the United

Nations in 1966, which were ratified by numerous countries, represent all the world's major religions. Above all, however, an internal differentiation into various currents and political tendencies is to be observed at present in all traditional religious cultures without exception. Moreover, empirical research confirms that in all the world's religions – depending on the social conditions – there are larger or smaller groups of people who interpret the religious tradition they are committed to in a particular way: namely that peaceful co-existence and active co-operation with other religions is a self-evident duty. They regard the basic social and political values which they associate with their religion as recognizing the equality of all philosophical, cultural and religious identities, so long as they also accept the principle of the mutual recognition of all.² This trend towards the convergence of all the world's religions has found powerful expression in the interreligious movement "World Ethos", which stresses the basic social and political values they have in common.³

Thus the revival of religious feeling – in many individual countries but also throughout the world – assumes many contradictory forms. A resurgence of personal religious faith exercised with respect for the democratic rule of law is also to be observed, for example. At the same time, two tendencies are engaged in a strange rivalry whose outcome is still open: the fundamentalist claims to power of politicized religion, on the one hand, and a spreading awareness of the shared basic social and political values of all the world's religions, on the other. The causes and effects of these developments are evidently as complex as their public perception.

1.3 The clash of civilizations ideology

In this confusing situation great and probably lasting damage has been done by the ideologically inspired thesis of a new clash of civilizations. With this thesis the well-known American political scientist *Samuel P. Huntington* has attempted to reduce the wide variety of new religious and cultural phenomena to a single concept – albeit one that is much too crude and empirically unfounded.⁴ According to his interpretation, the traditional religions of this world *in their social and political essence* are fundamentally incompatible with one another, which leads him to conclude that a growing political conflict between them is inevitable. Huntington sweepingly attributes the use of religion to achieve political supremacy and a corresponding inability to co-operate with other religious groupings first and foremost to Islam.

Peaceful co-operation, respect for universalist basic rights, religious tolerance and the functioning of real democracy are therefore essentially out of the question in Islamic societies, just as they are in international associations in which their representatives take part. Consequently only a policy of containment, if not outright subjection, can be an effective means of dealing with conflicting religions, especially Islam, in order to guarantee peace and stability in a globalized world.

Huntington's theory of the necessity of a dominance-oriented use of his own religiously impregnated "culture", that of the "West", is quite clearly an ideology dictated by self-interest. Nevertheless, and perhaps for this very reason, it has irrevocably entered the worldwide debate and now exerts a baleful influence on the perception of the relationship between religion and politics for important groups of players in all traditional religions. It is primarily the political fundamentalists in all religions who justify their declara-

2] Martin E. Marty / R. Scott Appleby (eds.): *Fundamentalisms Observed*. Chicago 1991.

3] Hans Küng / Karl Joseph Kuschel: *Erklärung zum Weltethos. Die Deklaration des Parlaments der Weltreligionen*. Munich/Zürich 1993.

4] Samuel P. Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, 1996.

tions of war on dissenters in their own camp or against other religions and cultures with the argument of incompatibility à la Huntington.⁵

1.4 Constellations of players

The players who determine the revived area of conflict between religion and politics are as varied as the trends and fault lines of this relationship. As regards the presumed or actual renaissance of personal religious faith in many countries and within the various traditional religions, it is mainly academics and journalists who offer their interpretations to the public, although in some cases representatives of individual religious groupings also formulate their claims. As long as these players keep their interpretations and the conclusions they draw within the framework of the democratic rule of law and transnational co-operation, they do not constitute a problem for a workable relationship between religion and politics. Not only that: if they keep within the legal bounds of the legitimate practice of religion in modern democracy, they can also make a contribution to public enlightenment on the subject.

This applies particularly to the central players in the *World Ethos* movement who represent all religions of the world, both in their formal organizations and in the informal sphere.⁶ Their attitude and the strength of their convictions, in particular, enable them to make important and, in some cases, highly effective contributions to clarifying the complex relationship between religion and politics: above all, the relationship between religious identity and the equal right to co-existence of different religions in each country and in the emerging world society as a whole, as set forth and called for by the universal basic rights. This work of enlightenment concerns all levels of political activity: the individual countries, the regional co-operation systems and the whole world political arena.

Far more spectacular than these new forms of interreligious co-operation, however, are the public appearances by representatives of politicized religions of fundamentalist hue, be they religious leaders, government ministers or opposition politicians, who make fundamentalist causes their own, or ideologues, publicists and intellectuals who advocate the cause of fundamentalism by resorting to the use of open or veiled ideological slogans. In recent times such players often seem to be engaged in a paradoxical interplay, even though their goals are diametrically opposed. Populist provocateurs and fundamentalist agitators are as much a part of this as bogus liberals, who "want to repay in the same coin" and media, which only direct attention to spectacular conflicts and riots and not to the everyday reality of intercultural relations. This fatal interplay can in some cases coagulate into a kind of *clash of civilizations industry*, in which all the players involved do service to the fundamentalist vision of the world by combining to play up apparent intercultural or interreligious incompatibilities.

As a result of all these developments the religious and cultural dimension has acquired a central significance in global politics. In addition to political and economic factors, religious and cultural factors play a significant role in many situations; they can do a lot to exacerbate economic and political conflicts, foil efforts at co-operation and generate large-scale conflicts to which no fair solution seems possible. This applies in equal measure to the internal affairs of individual countries, to co-operation in the regions and regional co-operation systems, and to world politics.

5] Thomas Meyer: Identitätspolitik. Vom Missbrauch kultureller Unterschiede. Frankfurt/Main 2002.

6] Hans Küng: Weltethos für Weltpolitik und Weltwirtschaft. Munich, 1997.

I.5 The cultural factor in the world arena

Whether a path of increasing co-operation and fair globalization can be embarked upon in world politics will depend, above all, on how the balance of forces between two tendencies develops: on the one hand, there is an increasing awareness worldwide of the shared basic social and political values of all religions and, on the other, the fundamentalist use of religion as part of a socio-cultural or political power strategy. Thus the strengthening of the actors by fostering awareness of commonalities is one of the most important ways of securing the basic development goals of a peaceful, just and co-operative world order. Equally important is the containment of the fundamentalist use of religion, which is one of the main challenges of the future.

However, since fundamentalism is not just an intellectual interpretation of religious tradition, as detailed analyses have shown, but primarily an expression of social, economic and political crises and conflicts, such a containment policy requires a comprehensive, multi-dimensional and long-term action strategy. In order to be realistic and successful, this strategy must combine social, economic and political elements effectively and convincingly.⁷

II. New experience for Germany

II.1 Domestic policy: religious and cultural pluralism

All the tendencies described above also affect the Federal Republic of Germany, both with regard to its domestic situation and its European and transnational policies. In recent decades, fundamentalist players were to be observed in Germany, albeit on a relatively small scale. Some of them justified a commitment to terrorist violence in terms of religious and cultural identity. To this must be added that, in the public debate on the issue, all sorts of integration problems of migrants are attributed to a religious and cultural minority background, just as spectacular acts of violence are to the effects of religious motives.

Some commentators and influential sections of the mass media even ascribe integration problems and individual acts of extremism – such as the so-called “honour killings” – to the basic inability of people with different religious and cultural identities to co-exist, in keeping with Huntington’s theory. In everyday life and in mainstream public discourse, however, a culture of peaceful co-existence between religions and cultures prevails, even though there is often no real understanding of the religion and culture of others.

Germany has just embarked on an in-depth discussion of what the relationship should be between religious and cultural identity and the civic status shared by all in a free and democratic social order. Important politicians have long refused to recognize the fact that Germany is a country of immigration. For this reason it is only since the debate on the *Integration Act* of 2005 that the much-needed and long overdue discussion of principles is slowly getting under way, albeit not without numerous misunderstandings and conflicts.

In essence, the position that Germany as a constitutional democracy has to adopt in relation to the various dimensions of the relationship between religion and politics both in

7] Manuel Castells: *The Information Age. Economy, Society and Culture. Vol. 2: The Power of Identity*, Oxford 2000.

domestic and foreign policy is clearly laid down in the constitution itself. It is true that Germany – unlike its neighbour France – is not defined by its constitution as a secular republic. Its public law approach, however, does make the state adopt a clear position of *active neutrality towards religions and philosophical communities*, which is compatible with universal basic rights and according to which the state has to respect and treat all religions and world views equally, so long as they, for their part, respect the democratic rule of law. The state does not have to keep out of religious affairs on principle, as it would be required to in a secular state, but if it does intervene it must strictly adhere to the rules of equal treatment for all religions.⁸

II.2 The debate about the “Leitkultur” (defining culture)

In the past, however, we have seen that this precise constitutional provision can in practice lead to very different positions on the part of the most influential political and media actors, especially in the parliamentary parties, which play a decisive role in determining state policy. The most striking expression of these differences is the debate about a “German Leitkultur”, which began in the 1990s and has been flaring up occasionally ever since. In the opinion of conservative and cultural commentators, it is not enough for all citizens to be in agreement on the basic social and political values of a constitutional democracy and its political culture. Yet this is the view taken by left-wingers and cultural liberals as well as the spokesmen of the main religious migrant groups, who insist on a restrictive interpretation, namely the necessity of a basic consensus on the social and political values which are necessary for successful integration.

By contrast, the conservatives would like to move beyond the political culture and make large parts of the core culture of “German tradition” compulsory for migrants and adherents of the various religious and cultural identity groups. Those raising this demand, however, overlook the fact that, in the wake of the cultural differentiation that is taking place in all modern societies, a core culture of this kind linking all members of the majority society ceased to exist some time ago. Thus the concept of the “Leitkultur” turns out to be a PR strategy to mobilize the electorate and cast suspicion on political opponents.

The spokesmen of migrant groups, especially Muslims of various provenance, refer to the constitution in their opposition to this levelling concept. They claim the right to determine their own cultural and religious identity and way of life in harmony with universal basic rights. In this the Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals are their political allies.

II.3 European identity

This domestic constellation is increasingly affecting Germany’s European policy. Inside the European Union and in their general foreign policy stance all German governments have pursued a policy of recognition anchored in basic rights despite the new virulence in the relationship between religion and politics. Thus, when it comes to declarations and official documents, the principles of political secularism and recognition of the equal value of all religions and denominations that recognize basic rights have a solid foundation. Yet the position of the CDU and since 2005 certain new tones of the grand coalition government on the issue of Turkey’s accession to the EU, influenced by the conservatives, give rise to doubts about the sustainability of this position as a fixed element in Germany’s European policy. This development is seen by many actors, especially Muslims in the EU and Turkey, as an unacceptable return of the religious factor to European policy.

⁸ Hartmut Kress: Religion im säkularen Staat. In: Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte, No. 12, 2006, pp. 20–23.

II.4 Global responsibility

In the global arena there is a lot of evidence that the voice and the attitude of Germany with regard to the new politico-religious fault lines are seen by the actors affected, especially in Islamic quarters, as being insufficiently in keeping with its own declared position. After all, Germany sees itself on the world stage as an unreserved advocate of international law and its core, the universalist basic rights of the UN covenants of 1966, whose chapters on civil, social and cultural basic rights contain a clear commitment to a policy of recognition, which includes equal respect for all religions.

Doubts about consistent adherence to the associated policy of fair and equal respect for all religions arise in the minds of some observers as a result of the various comments and activities of official German spokesmen in relation to Turkey's accession to the EU and to the – in this respect – sensitive parts of US global policy. At the very latest since the new policy adopted by the Bush administration, the USA is perceived in nearly all developing countries, in many countries of Asia, and by the vast majority of Muslims all over the world as a world power whose policy is based on supremacy and the glaringly unequal treatment of different religions and cultures. In the eyes of these critics, the policy of the USA is committed to the terms of reference of the Huntingtonian clash-of-civilizations ideology. This view is not only based on the argument that its attitude to the Middle East conflict has little credibility. An important point of criticism concerns the strategic manner in which the Bush administration conducts its self-proclaimed "war on terror" both in domestic and foreign policy as well as its treatment of prisoners and suspects in this "war".

In these important questions the attitude of Germany is measured by many actors in the Third World and other religious, mainly Muslim countries and communities by how the key political players behave with regard to the religious or pseudo-religious dimension of international relations and conflicts. A major role is also played by the question as to how far Germany supports the USA on these issues, both symbolically and in real terms, and whether it succeeds in living up to its own principles by marking out its own separate position in a convincing and credible way.

The role of the religious and cultural dimension in international relations is often regarded as a challenge for cultural policy alone. That is why, in official documents on foreign policy, it has not yet been accorded the significance it deserves in a world plagued by religious and pseudo-religious conflicts. In view of the present world situation, however, it is essential, for the reasons set out above, to take proper account of its actual significance and of the extraordinarily explosive nature of its ambivalent potential. This requires a differentiated analytical understanding of the issues involved both by the politically interested public and the responsible political institutions and actors.

The prime concern of the leading political players must be to consider the religious and cultural dimension in all areas involving international action and to make sure that, in any given case, Germany's policy of recognition is expressed in no uncertain terms. An important contribution could be made by using opportunities of symbolic or real political significance to effectively present its own position to the global public. It is of vital importance that Germany should clearly and consistently assert its traditional role as an advocate of universal basic rights even under the conditions of global terrorism and the fight against it.

III. Scenarios

The dynamic of the tense interaction of religious and political factors in world politics appears to be open at the current point in time. In the discussions that follow we can ignore the revival of personal religious faith of the kind that accepts democracy and the rule of law. Regardless of whether this revival continues to grow in strength, as many observers suppose, or not, it is a trend that represents no threat to democracy, political co-operation or a fair world order. No possible developments in this field could involve any novel challenges. But the situation is very different with regard to the future prospects of two trends which are in sharp contradiction to each other: political co-operation between traditional religions and cultures, on the one hand, and a fundamentalist policy of conflict, on the other.

III.1 Scenario: Fundamentalist conflict spirals

Series of related factors

It is possible that the fundamentalist conflict scenario in the global arena, at the regional level and in a few large democratic countries is constantly gaining ground and that, for a lengthy period of time, it will generate a self-renewing tendency of increasing escalation. A whole series of related factors points to such a development.

Even if a policy of recognition is proclaimed at the symbolic level, fundamentalist agitation will continue to receive fresh impetus as long as there is a failure to fulfil the most important socio-economic and political conditions in a way that would convince all concerned worldwide that all religions really were being treated with equal respect. The same effect would be produced by a policy on the part of the USA, or even of Europe, that accepted a suspension of the Middle East conflict under conditions that would be understood in the Islamic world as an affront to its claims to religious and cultural identity as well as a gross violation of the conditions for a fair compromise on socio-economic interests.

If, on top of this, a unilateral or multilateral policy of hegemony is pursued in the global arena, which in the eyes of the Islamic countries appears as a form of political strong-arming, this tendency would be further reinforced. The same applies to the distribution of enrichment opportunities and resources in the developing countries. Most of these countries belong to other religious and cultural traditions than the leading world powers, many of them to Islam.

Since there is no more compulsive and strongly motivating political language than the politico-religious ideology of the fundamentalists to articulate conflicts over resources and grievances concerning political exclusion in the modern world, this ideology gains an almost unrivalled significance in the formulation and organization of everything from protest to violent resistance under the conditions described above.

Likely conflict spirals

This tendency can be considerably reinforced by the functioning mechanisms of an emerging "clash of civilizations industry" to the point when it becomes almost irreversible. A sample of paradigmatic quality in this respect was the cartoon dispute unleashed by the Danish periodical *Jylland Posten* in 2006. In this case the cycle of conflict escalation, driven by the antagonistic interaction of actors of the "clash of civilizations industry", moved from a right-wing, populist-motivated, religious provocation to an apparent

conflict of principle between cultures. This triggered the expected reaction from Islamic fundamentalists in all parts of the world, namely a hate-filled struggle not only against the actual instigators of the provocation, but against the country from which the provocateurs came, and finally against the whole of “Western Christian civilization”. This development, in turn, quickly brought liberal actors onto the scene, who felt obliged to defend their culture against unjustified attacks, thus misconstruing the actions of the Islamic fundamentalists as an expression of the culture they represented. The media enlarged, aggravated and prolonged the conflict by lurid reporting on all spectacular activities, thus enhancing both the incentive payment for these activities and the tendency to escalation.

A further twist in these conflict spirals might consist in such coverage causing the boundaries between Islam and Islamism to become gradually blurred among large sections of the public, so that an essentially fundamentalist view of the others could spread in liberal democratic countries as well. To the extent that such a view finds its expression among the public, in civil society and in the lives of both individual countries and the global public, it could prepare the ground for the spread of fundamentalist attitudes – as compensation for withheld recognition – in other religions as well.

Violence-promoting climate

Such a scenario could create a worldwide atmosphere in which terrorist activities and violent conflicts flourish at all levels. The conditions for co-operation and understanding would then become considerably worse. Once the dynamic is sufficiently advanced, it could become a self-perpetuating process for quite some time, making it more and more difficult for the counterforces to intervene successfully and win acceptance for a realistic, cooperation-oriented view of the others. Many zones of conflict in the world, such as Northern Ireland or Sri Lanka with its clashes between Tamils and Sinhalese, illustrate the potential and the development mechanisms of such a dynamic. In this process, repeated and continuing violence – as both examples impressively demonstrate – is decisive in escalating the conflict, as it seems to provide vivid proof of the asserted incompatibility of the religions involved.

Events since 11 September 2001 and the way in which the USA has so far been waging the “war on terror” both at home and abroad favour the unfolding of this scenario.

III.2 Scenario: Intercultural co-operation

Convergence of basic political values

At present a desirable and certainly possible, though by no means certain, alternative scenario would appear to be an increasing convergence of basic social and political values among the world’s main religious and cultural traditions, both in the regions and in the great majority of countries.

Peaceful co-existence in mutual recognition of religious cultures requires no convergence of religious beliefs. All it needs is the common acceptance of those basic social and political values which make political co-operation and mutual acceptance possible, i.e. first and foremost universal basic rights. A politico-cultural convergence of this kind, which does not entail any surrendering of religious beliefs or cultural identity, is already noticeable among important elites of all religious cultures, albeit to different extents and with varying degrees of attraction.⁹

⁹ Cf. Küng, *ibid.*; Meyer, *ibid.*

A tendency towards increasing convergence in this sense is promoted by the modernization of societies, by increasing regional co-operation at the political level and by premiums for transnational co-operation under conditions of globalization. The more the population's level of education rises, the more the standard of living improves and makes the development of a democratic framework for practical co-operation with representatives of other religious and cultural traditions possible and likely, the more the lure of fundamentalism will be weakened. Co-operation between representatives of other cultural-religious traditions at the transnational level and in civil society facilitates convergence on basic social and political questions and calls fundamentalist claims and interpretations into doubt.

The world's resources must be fairly shared

The convergence scenario would gain traction if credible efforts to achieve a more equitable distribution of the world's material resources and the fair involvement of all countries in political decisions concerning them were discernible. A key instance as far as the Islamic world is concerned is the need to find a solution to the Middle East conflict that is acceptable to all parties. Such a solution presupposes convincing signs of a policy of recognition in the countries and regions involved, which apart from equal esteem for all religions in private life and in the public sphere would also bring about progress in integrating religious and cultural minorities, and in particular letting them have a fair share of social resources.

Other major contributions to this development include the introduction of intercultural learning processes in the entire educational system of the individual countries and efforts to create civil society and day-to-day co-operation between the various religious milieus. The mass media, in particular, can play a decisive role here.

An important step in promoting this scenario could be for the mass media in the individual countries, when dealing with this explosive issue, to refrain from the kind of sensationalism that only focuses on the most spectacular occurrences with respect to the minorities within religious communities. Instead, they should see their task as one of political and moral enlightenment in conveying a fair and realistic picture of the various religions, even if the logic of the media does not always provide the best of starting points.

Political players

Although the role of government and other political players in this area of activity is limited, a lot can still be done to create a framework and bring influence to bear. For a start, educational targets can be set for the pre-school, school and further education curricula. Another form of influence is the use of sanctions against the fundamentalist misuse of religion to violate the basic rights of others as well as the pursuit of good relations with other religions and their representatives, of which politicians can set a public example every day.

All this depends, of course, on how successfully educational, social and economic policy can be applied at all political levels to effectively demonstrate the fair and equal treatment of adherents of all religions and cultures in the public sphere and to confront people in their everyday lives with the real value of a co-operative policy of recognition for all. This requires the consistent pursuit of a policy of fair globalization. If the USA were to switch to this course under new leadership, decisive impetus could be given to the emergence of such a scenario.

IV. Germany: Partner in a worldwide basic rights policy

IV.1 Actors and levels of activity

How the tense relationship between religion and politics is going to develop is still an open question. The prospects of success for these different options will be determined by a large and indeterminate number of actors operating in different spheres. They include states and transnational institutions, parties, civil societies and religious communities and, first and foremost, the mass media. The interactions between the national, regional and global arenas are close and direct under the conditions created by globalization and the electronic mass media.

Whether the rebirth of religion can take place within the framework of a general recognition of basic rights is largely a matter for the actors themselves. They can, by their example and a convincing defence of their view of the relationship between religion and politics, do a lot to advance the process of interreligious and intercultural consensus-building through the recognition of basic political values. Such a course will in practice refute – even more than the relevant discourses – the fundamentalist policy of conflict in all camps. For this reason these actors should be actively supported by government and civil society actors in the establishment of intercultural forums, publication opportunities, encounters and networks. The importance of a sustained commitment to this kind of activity is often underestimated by political leaders, as media neglect keeps it out of the public eye. It is not spectacular, barely visible, but indispensable because of the depth and breadth of its social effects.

Of key importance to a successful integration policy is a system of education which is able to iron out social and language differences at an early, pre-school stage and guarantees all children, regardless of origin, equal opportunities for personality development and later choice of career. In this way social relations between people of different religions and cultures can come to be seen as normal early on in life.

IV.2 Basic rights instead of "Leitkultur"

Domestically, the German state has opted not for strict secularism, but for a policy of *active neutrality* towards all religions and world views. In a state dedicated to public welfare and the rule of law this includes an educational and economic policy geared to integration and socio-economic equality of opportunity. On the other hand, a "Leitkultur" which goes beyond the political culture of the democratic rule of law and the ability of all citizens to have an active share in it and demands the assimilation of other religions and cultures at the level of personal core culture is not only illegitimate, but also counterproductive. For such a demand deepens the gulf between religions and cultures and strengthens the fundamentalist voices and organizations in the minority cultures as well as the right-wing populist potential in the majority culture.

IV.3 European identity

The same essentially applies to the European level. Here, however, there are two questions of fundamental significance to be resolved. One concerns how the European Union is to define its cultural and political identity in its constitution. Even today the Union is a highly multicultural society and will become more so in future. It is home to almost 11 million Muslims, who are spread over a fairly large number of member countries and, apart from small splinter groups, are essentially integrated into their majority societies. These Muslims accept the rules of the democratic rule of law and claim the recognition of their religious and cultural identity, as long as they continue to place value on it. If they are citizens of their countries and hence also of the European Union, they have an unqualified claim to have their equal rights as citizens recognized. If they live in their host countries without having the rights of citizens, they can claim to have their religious and cultural identity recognized by appealing to universal basic rights. This indisputable claim must be taken into account in a clear and unmistakable manner when defining the identity of the Union in the European Constitution. Religious traditions have no place in the description of the identity of a democratic community governed by the rule of law nor in the related citizens' role expected by everybody. Under these circumstances, giving prominence to an individual religious tradition will certainly be understood by adherents of other traditional religions as a bid for hegemony, which would deprive the legal, democratic and, above all, secular claims of the European Constitution of their credibility. Such a procedure would have grave consequences in the shape of religious and cultural conflicts. It is therefore important that, in these debates and in the decision to be taken on a constitution, the Federal Republic of Germany should adopt a clear public position and underpin it with convincing arguments.

The admission of Turkey to the EU, which has latterly become the subject of controversy again, is also of great symbolic significance in this respect. Muslims inside and outside Turkey will take careful note of whether religious considerations come into play in the arguments and decisions of the leading actors in the European Union, both governments and NGOs. If there is a widespread impression that the European Union, as a "secret Christian club", is closing its doors to Turkey primarily because of its Islamic majority society, this would not only have negative effects on the internal situation of the rejected country. It could also bring about a sharp change in the attitude many Muslims living in EU member countries have to their majority societies, so that far-reaching and possibly long-lasting alienation effects might be expected. It can also be anticipated that in all parts of the Muslim world the accession thus withheld would be interpreted as a strong expression of disdain and exclusion – with correspondingly negative consequences for co-operation between states, religious communities and societies in the global arena.

IV.4 The role of civil society

Not everything that is necessary for the promotion of a policy of co-operation can be provided by the state. This applies equally at the national, regional and global levels. Civil society can assume a considerable role in the promotion of a positive relationship between religion and politics in a world of cultural pluralism. Comparative studies have shown that co-operation and understanding between different religious and cultural social groups flourish best, and distrust and prejudices can be most effectively dispelled and prevented, where areas of activity are penetrated by different milieus and civil society in an overlapping of religions and cultures. The state cannot replace civil society as an actor in these areas of activity, but it can support and promote it.

IV.5 A consistent orientation in the global arena

The international policy of the USA and the relationship of other political actors to it play a key role in the prospects held out by the two opposing scenarios in the global arena, although there will be intensive repercussions on regions and national societies. This applies, above all, to Islamic fundamentalism's worldwide potential for development. Of great importance for its extremist, violent element and its sympathizers is what Ernst-Otto Czempiel calls "contexts of terrorism". This is a reference to three major sources of conflict in the world: the *unresolved Middle East problem*; the *crassly unjust distribution of prosperity* between North and South; and the *power-oriented US policy of hegemony* in the world arena. These areas of conflict constantly provide fundamentalist agitators, even in the remotest provinces of individual countries in Asia and Africa, with arguments justifying their central thesis: that "Western Christian" culture intends to dominate and exploit the rest of the world, especially the Islamic part of it.

It is in relation to these questions that the actors concerned and their associates are taking a close look at the symbolic positions and *realpolitik* strategies of individual countries. Germany, both as an individual actor and in association with the other member states of the European Union, must therefore give a clear presentation of its notion of a policy of recognition in relation to these problem areas in a manner that is conscientious, has long-term credibility and is symbolically unequivocal. Germany's official policy of recognition in the relationship between different religions and cultures must be communicated and implemented as a model for the whole spectrum of German politics in a way that is clear in its programme and consistent in practice. Recognition of the equal value of all religious and cultural identities, so long as they for their part respect universal basic rights, as well as a fair share for all in the material resources of world society, must be the recognizable direction taken by German policy in all political arenas.

If Germany is to make the contribution it is capable of to strengthening the forces of political co-operation worldwide, the most reliable course it can take in the long term – including in terms of *realpolitik* – is one of consistent commitment to international law and, in particular, to the universal basic rights enshrined in the UN covenants of 1966, as they incorporate in exemplary fashion the combination of basic civil, political, social and economic rights, on the one hand, and basic cultural rights, on the other. It should provide the key signpost for a policy of recognition which, for its part, expects recognition of all the actors concerned.

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