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# KING

Knowledge for INtegration Governance

## Islamic Religious Instruction in France and Germany: Implementation Processes in Different State-Religion Regimes

**Dietrich Thränhardt**

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# KING - Knowledge for INtegration Governance

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The KING project's objective is to elaborate a report on the **state of play** of migrant integration in Europe through an interdisciplinary approach and to provide decision- and policy-makers with **evidence-based recommendations** on the design of migrant integration-related policies and on the way they should be articulated between different policy-making levels of governance.

Migrant integration is a truly multi-faceted process. The contribution of the insights offered by different disciplines is thus essential in order better to grasp the various aspects of the presence of migrants in European societies. This is why **multidisciplinary** is at the core of the KING research project, whose Advisory Board comprises experts of seven different disciplines:

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The present paper belongs to the series of contributions produced by the researchers of the “Public Administration” team directed by Walter Kindermann.

The project is coordinated by the **ISMU Foundation**.

## Contacts:

Guia Gilardoni, Project Coordinator – [g.gilardoni@ismu.org](mailto:g.gilardoni@ismu.org)

Daniela Carrillo, Project Co-Coordinator – [d.carrillo@ismu.org](mailto:d.carrillo@ismu.org)

Marina D’Odorico, Project Co-Coordinator – [m.dodorico@ismu.org](mailto:m.dodorico@ismu.org)

**Website:** [www.king.ismu.org](http://www.king.ismu.org)

**Twitter:** @KING\_Project\_EU

ISMU Foundation

[www.ismu.org](http://www.ismu.org)

Via Copernico 1

20125 Milano

Italy

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# Islamic Religious Instruction in France and Germany: Implementation Processes in Different State-Religion Regimes<sup>1</sup>

## 1. LAÏCITÉ IN FRANCE, PRIVILEGED RELIGION IN GERMANY

France and Germany are known to have opposite systems of state-religion relations: Since 1905, France is the international model of a separation of church and state, and cultivates “*laïcité*”, the neutrality of the state towards religion. French students do not get any faith-bound religious instruction in public schools. However, schools do not offer classes on Wednesday afternoon, emptying an afternoon, and religious bodies are free to use school buildings in these open hours to offer religious education on their own.

Germany, on the other hand, has a constitutionally anchored system of church-state-relations, privileging churches and religion in many ways, including church-defined religious instruction in schools, faith-based theological faculties in universities, church taxes collected by fiscal authorities, comprehensive financial state donations for the established churches, and priority for church-bound welfare organizations in social services and kindergartens. Churches in Germany enjoy a privileged position. With respect to schools, there is a constitutional guarantee for denominational religious instruction, and German schools offer religious instruction from the first year of primary school up to the *Abitur*. Students are free to participate.

Thus it is particularly interesting to compare how the two countries are going to integrate Islam into their systems of religious instruction. If Islam is treated equally with Catholicism, Protestantism and Judaism, and Muslims act like Catholics, Protestants and Jews, we should expect denominationally defined (*bekennnisgebundene*) Islamic religious instruction in schools in Germany, and religious afternoon instruction, organized by Muslim mosques, in France. In both countries, however, legal opportunities are necessary but not sufficient to create such a reality. Up to now, Muslim associations founded in the last decades cannot compare with churches with respect to tradition, public influence, established networks, broad membership, funding, organizational stability and respect in the public. In the past, churches have defended or gained their positions in struggles with the state or with oppositionist political forces, largely successful in Germany, and less successful in France. Thus Muslims need to build an Islamic pillar parallel to churches and Jewish Communities. This process is going on in many European countries, step by step, albeit slowly, and related to debates about Islam in Europe, about the equality of different faiths, and political interventions.

## 2. SOME CAVEATS

Looking more closely into the situation, we find some caveats, and more parallels than an observer of principled discussions would suspect. First, there are substantial territorial exceptions. In Germany, three

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Ines Michalowski for informing me about French Mosque internet sources.

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*Länder* are exempted from the constitutional guarantee of denominational religious instruction: Bremen, Berlin and Brandenburg. In Berlin, religious institutions have the right to use school buildings and to organized religious instruction on their own, largely resembling the situation in France, even if the state reimburses them for the costs. However, there is no free afternoon. In 2007, Berlin has even inaugurated compulsory ethics instruction for grades 7-10, against the wishes of the churches and in a laicist style. The move was motivated by the low acceptance of religious instruction by teenagers, and the wish to teach ethics for all children in a more and more complex world. Churches were not successful in initiating a referendum against the ethics instructions. Interestingly, France introduced “moral instruction” in primary schools just one year later, in 2008 (Weber 2014: 105).

In France, Alsace and Moselle hold on with a *régime concordataire*, in the tradition of the Napoleonic system of 1801. The region was part of Germany in 1905 as Elsass-Lothringen, when the *laicist* system was introduced in France, and was allowed to keep the *système concordataire* when France annexed the region in 1918. Thus the French president still nominates the bishops of Strasbourg and Metz. Catholic, Protestant and Jewish religious institutions are state-financed, and legally they are public entities (*établissements public du culte*), similar to *öffentliche Körperschaften* in Germany. The reality in schools resembles the German situation closely, up to the point that many students tend to opt out of religious instruction when they reach the age where they themselves can decide to attend or not (Gillig 2012). Islam is not a recognized cult (*culte reconnu*) in Alsace, but authorities have subsidized the building of the mosque Eyub Sultan in Strasbourg, connected to the Milli Görüs movement. The city also contributed to the building of the *Grande Mosquée de Strasbourg*, serving immigrants from North Africa and particularly Morocco. In 2006, a motion was introduced at the *Assemblée nationale*, to conclude a concordat with the Muslim communities in Alsace.<sup>2</sup> The other religious groups in Alsace are sympathetic to such a move, since it would consolidate the regional *régime concordataire*. In 2003, a commission proposed the introduction of Islamic religious instruction in Alsace-Moselle (Weber 2014, 107).

Second, the reality on the ground is not so clearly structured as the first look would suggest. In France, every third school is private, and many are Catholic. Most of them enjoy a state-funded status, parents pay additional fees, and the school quality is usually assessed as comparing positively to most state schools. Thus *laicism* applies only to two thirds of the French schools, and for an aspiring Muslim family it may be tempting to send their children to a Catholic school.

Many parts of Germany, on the other hand, have undergone intense secularization in the last decades, and religious substance is depleting (Großbölting 2013; Hessen 2013). This is particularly characteristic of Eastern Germany where De-Christianization was the only lasting success of the Communist regime. But it is also a feature of the larger cities, of Northern Germany, and particularly large parts of the younger generation.

### 3. MOVES TO INCORPORATE ISLAM IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Following the 9/11 attacks on the United States and George W. Bush’s “crusades” in the Middle East, many European states feared that the growing international tensions would have repercussions at home. They tried to encourage or create Islamic institutions on the model of churches, to constitute a dialog partner with whom they would be able to solve any problems emerging, hoping to foster a “moderate” Islam. They

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<sup>2</sup> [Proposition de loi visant à intégrer le culte musulman dans le droit concordataire d’Alsace et de Moselle \[archive\]](#) du 28 juin 2006.

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wanted to integrate Islam, and thus limit the appeal and the reach of terrorist and fundamentalist networks.

These were parallel moves in France, Germany, Italy, Britain, Austria, Sweden, Spain and the Netherlands, as Jonathan Laurence (2012) explains in his book on “The Emancipation of Europe’s Muslims”. In the decades before, these countries had “outsourced” Islam to the countries of origin of the immigrants, institutions that Laurence calls “embassy Islam”. The new idea was to “domesticate” Islam, and to help a German, French or “European” Islam come into existence. Laurence characterizes the emerging institutional settings as “corporatist”, offering Islamic institutions a status in the national realm, and at the same time including them structurally into the polity. European states tried to find and further a partner, and to create united Islamic organizations. As Minkenburg (2003, 196) concludes in a different context, “inherited” typologies have “a limited relevance for policy outputs”. It is interesting that French cities subsidize the construction of mosques much more than German cities where mosques are often still situated in industrial zoning areas (*Gewerbegebiete*). They follow the lead of state policies (Laurence 2012, 186).

„With the French Council for the Muslim Religion, we are organizing an Islam that is compatible with the values of the Republic.” (Sarkozy 2003, quoted in Laurence 2012, 129). Given the tradition of *laïcité*, it is remarkable that it was in France where the state acted most deliberately and decisively to create an Islamic religious body. Similar to Napoleon’s institutionalization of a Jewish religious entity inside the French political order, Sarkozy invited a gathering of Muslim organizations, and was able to persuade Muslims to found a central representation of the Muslims in France, the *Conseil Français du culte musulman (CFCM)*. He actively contacted the various groups to unite them in a common body in 2003 (Laurence 2012, 179). This was followed by the creation of the *Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid in the Netherlands*, the *Consulta per l’Islam in Italy*, the *Deutsche Islam-Konferenz (DIK) in Germany*, and the *Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board in Britain*.

*The Austrian government is currently preparing an “Islamgesetz” which would monopolize an “Islam österreichischer Prägung” in one organization and make any other organizations illegal (Hafez 2014; Mikl-Leitner 2014). This is a much more state-controlled concept which denies freedom of religious organization, whereas the corporatist concepts in the other countries keep a balance between public status and acceptance on the one hand and freedom of association on the other. The Austrian approach demonstrates the intention of control, even if it is doubtful under democratic standards, and would model Islam on the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church.*

Sarkozy tried to create a legitimate institution to act and speak for Islam in France. Wolfgang Schäuble, then interior minister in Germany, acted similarly in Germany, and urged existing Islamic communities to create an umbrella institution that would represent Islam in Germany. Even if this body unites very different member organizations, and the Turkish state-affiliated Diyanet dwarfs its partners with respect to finances, followers, and outstanding new mosque buildings, the move was successful. In France, the organizers were able to create a federation of individual mosques. Since there were no membership statistics, they creatively divided the voting rights along the size of the mosques, objectively measured per square meter. The state even collects the mosque’s fees for the national Conseil, an “unusual favor” (Lawrence 2012, 179) that resembles a bit of the collection of church taxes in Germany. The socialist government after Sarkozy followed the same path. Manuel Valls, in his time as the minister of the interior, subsidized the training of imams, hoping to construct « un islam de France » and to serve « l’intérêt général », in October 2013, when he presented diplomas to the first group of newly trained imams. Thus French authorities went out of their traditional way of state neutrality towards religion, and supported a new French Islam (Des Imams, 2014).

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In Germany, the *Koordinierungsrat der Muslime* is a loose umbrella organization of four Muslim groups. It is only existent on the federal level, and has not structures on the Länder level – a serious deficit since the Länder deal with schools, Kindergartens, prisons, hospitals and other important institutional settings. There are plans to create Islamic umbrella organizations on the Länder level, too, but up to now they were not enacted.

#### 4. INTRODUCING ISLAMIC INSTRUCTION IN A FEDERALIST COUNTRY: GERMANY

Germany is a federal country, France a unitary. This is particularly relevant for our context since it means that the German minister of the interior can talk to Muslims, help to establish an umbrella organization, give advice for the introduction of Islamic instruction in schools, and create a favourable climate in the public, but he cannot implement anything. However, the Federal government decided to give initial funding for Islamic academic centres at universities. They were established in four places: Frankfurt-Gießen, Münster-Osnabrück, Tübingen and Erlangen. They shall institutionalize Islamic theology at German universities, and train Imams and teachers of Islamic religion. They started working in the academic year 2001/12. The federal ministry expects them to lay the ground for a well-founded denominational religious instruction („*fundierten bekenntnisorientierten schulischen Religionsunterricht*“), and at the same time to create a „chance to introduce historic-critical methods dealing with the Quran“ („*Chance zu einer historisch-kritischen Methode im Umgang mit dem Koran*“). Thus they introduce the classic dilemma between academic freedom of research and teaching on the one hand and denominational attachment on the other that has been fruitful and conflict ridden for the Protestant and particularly the Catholic Theological Faculties in Germany over more than a century. Up to now, there has been one conflict with a *Beirat* in Münster about theological tradition and provenance, and nothing like the sensational eviction of Professor Küng in Tübingen by his former friend and colleague Cardinal Ratzinger when Küng had dared to discuss the infallibility of the Pope. It is interesting that the Münster conflict originated in a veto of the ministry of the interior against a *Beirat* member associated with Milli Görüs.

With respect to schools, the *Länder* are in charge, and whatever the federal minister in Berlin proclaims, they will defend their prerogatives in the education sector, a central part of their autonomy. Every *Land* pursues its own policy, and some *Länder* did not react at all when the German Islam Conference urged them to introduce Islamic religious instruction. The new *Länder* (former East Germany) are not particularly interested since they do not have much Islamic population.

Hessen has most consequently followed the provisions of the German constitution and the traditions of German state-church relations. The Hessen government concluded separate treaties with two Sunni organizations, the Turkish-origin DITIB and the Pakistani-origin Ahmadiya, and with the Alevi organisation, giving them the responsibility for the content of religious instruction. Teachers are trained respectively (see the Hessen report for details). The New York Times reported: “For the first time, German public schools are offering classes in Islam to primary school students using state-trained teachers and specially written textbooks, as officials try to better integrate the nation’s large Muslim minority and counter the growing influence of radical religious thinking. The classes offered in Hesse State are part of a growing consensus that Germany, after decades of neglect, should do more to acknowledge and serve its Muslim population if it is to foster social harmony, overcome its aging demographics and head off a potential domestic security threat. The Hesse curriculum effectively places Islamic instruction on equal footing with similarly state-approved ethics training in the Protestant and Catholic faiths. By offering young Muslims a basic introduction to Islam as early as first grade, emphasizing its teachings on tolerance and acceptance, the

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authorities hope to inoculate young people against more extreme religious views while also signalling state acceptance of their faith.” (Smale 2014). The instruction is offered in 27 schools. Thus it serves only a tiny fraction of students in Hessen, but the idea is to extend it, step by step.

Other German *Länder* have introduced interim arrangements, consulting Islamic organisations but not conceding the definition of doctrines and contents of religious instruction. They want to proceed faster, and be less dependent on Islamic organizations. North Rhine Westphalia, e. g., has established an advisory council (*Beirat*) where Islamic organizations have a voice but not the power of decision. This is meant as a *provisoire* but may be last long. However, the concept does not meet the peculiarities of the German Constitution, and does not position Islamic instruction parallel to Catholic and Protestant instruction, but gives the state more say in Islamic religious affairs.

In Bavaria, Islamic religious instruction is given at 300 schools, following the local „Erlangen model“, based on a curriculum that has been established in cooperation between the Erlangen Islamic religious community, Islamic and Protestant theologians, school teachers of religion, professors of religion, Islamic and Arabic studies and education and the Bavarian ministry of culture.

Hamburg has developed a special alternative: a “dialogic religious instruction for all” (*dialogischer Religionsunterricht für alle*). It is a cooperative solution including all religious groups – Protestant, Islamic, Alevi, Jewish, Buddhist – under the coordinating responsibility of the Protestant (Lutheran) Church as the traditional church of the city. The intent is to establish religious competence (*religiöse Kompetenz*) in an open and mutually tolerant setting (Doedens/ Weiße 2007). The Hamburg way has been developed over decades, step by step, in a consensus between the city government, the traditional Lutheran Church and other religious partners, particularly Islamic and Alevi organizations. Religion in this concept has a status as an ordinary school subject, as conceived in the constitution. Only the Catholic Church is not part of the arrangement, and has reserved the right to offer a separate religious instruction in some schools (Only ten per cent of Hamburgers are Catholics). The Hamburg way is motivated by the wish to create a common religious instruction for all children, to further mutual understanding and to have an integrative approach. Pragmatically it is justified by the impossibility to offer separate faith-bound religious instruction to a more and more diverse school population. Moreover, it is argued that separate religious instruction does not find much acceptance in Hamburg – a result of the long tradition of common religious education and of successful consensus building.

The establishment of an interreligious “Academy of World Religions” in 2010, comprising research and teaching of all the related religions, has complemented the comprehensive religious instruction in schools. The concept stresses interrelated theological and didactic research and practice. It includes Professors for Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Alevi, Hindi and Buddhist religions. For the first time in the world, a Professorship for Alevi studies has been created in 2014, continuing the process of “coming out” of Alevi that had started in Hamburg in 1988/89, and had repercussions in Germany, Turkey and other countries (Sökefeld 2008; Aksünger 2013).

Berlin had to concede religious teaching rights to the “Islamic Federation Berlin” on the same basis as for the other religions from 2001/02 on. The city government delayed the decision for 14 years because it considered the organization affiliated to *Milli Görüs* and fundamentalist. The case went through the courts and at last, the Federal Administrative Court stated that Berlin had made “cryptic accusations of fundamentalism”, and not stated them precisely. Therefore the Islamic Federation had the right to organize Islamic instruction in Berlin schools. Bernhard Schlink, the well-known author, in his function as the advocate for the Berlin government, had argued that the German constitution gave the right for religious instruction mainly to Christian religion – a rather ridiculous argument (Berliner Zeitung 2014). Today the

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organizers of Islamic instruction in Berlin face the problem that the city does not tolerate headscarves for teachers. Consequently, only men are teaching Islamic religion, in 28 schools.

German *Länder* will continue to follow different ways, as they do with Catholic and Protestant religious instruction. Hessen has followed the constitution closely, and granted its Islamic partners their proper role. However, it has a long way to go, training teachers and bringing Islamic instruction to the rest of its 1876 schools. The “Erlangen model” is based on an intense cooperation and includes strong Protestant and state inputs. Like the Hamburg model, it is on the edge of the constitutional possibilities. Former Hessen Justice minister Hahn has criticized the Beiratsmodell in North Rhine Westphalia and Lower Saxony as unconstitutional. It is meant to be a *provisoire*. The Hamburg model is based on a strong consensus, also comprising all political parties in the city, and rooted in traditions of which the city is proud. It would, however, be difficult to export it to other *Länder*, with the exception of Bremen.

A majority of the population is in favour of introducing Islamic religious instruction in schools (SVR 2014, 36). It is interesting that non-Muslim immigrant groups are much more critical of Islamic instruction than the indigenous population. Most sceptical are European immigrants and Aussiedler from Poland and the former Soviet Union (SVR 2014, 37). Interestingly, the Protestant Church is active in integrating Islam in several *Länder* (Mittmann 2010). They also entertain a special relationship with the Alevi federation.

## 5. INTRODUCING ISLAMIC INSTRUCTION: FRANCE

Reading French texts on religious education, one is confronted with the *laïcité* principle, meaning that the French state is neutral, and there is no religious teaching at French schools. Still, paganism, Christianity, Islam, crusades, confessional wars, the persecution of Huguenots, rex christianissimus, are all elements of French history. This has resulted in the concept of “*laïcité et fait religieux*”, meaning that religious “facts” are taught and reflected in school, and integrated into the “*culture commune de l’école*” (Carpentier 2004; Debray 2011). This process continues, and today has to reflect Jewish and Islamic religion, too. Surveys demonstrate French school teachers to be insecure how to teach “religious facts”. Textbooks are “vague” and treat Christianity with much less distance as Islam (Weber 2014, 105).

Like Catholics, Muslims have the right to establish schools. There are now 49 private Islamic schools. The number is small, compared to about 280 Jewish and 9000 Catholic schools. In these schools, religion can become an element of teaching. If such schools do want access to public subsidies and recognition, they must meet certain curricular and practical standards.

As faith-bound religious instruction is left to religious communities in France, Mosques are active in teaching religion, parallel to the Catholic Church, and of Protestant and Jewish communities. Some Muslim web sites even speak of “*catéchisme musulman*”, using a traditional Christian term. Contrary to Catholic patterns, the teaching is often practised in Mosques, parallel to other activities, and particularly on Wednesday and Saturdays. As the websites show, it often goes parallel to adult education. Even if Islamic associations have not yet got a privileged status in Alsace-Moselle, they are subsidized under the regional association law. Authorities in Alsace and Moselle, and particularly in Strasbourg and Metz, seem to be much more open for subsidizing Muslim institutions than their German colleagues.

In contrast to Catholic practice using school premises, Islamic teaching is mainly taking place in Mosques, possibly out of practical grounds, due to the smaller numbers of Muslim students in school. There are no country-wide statistics, due to the decentralized and multi-origin character of Islam in France, which is still



largely informed by the traditions of the countries of origin, particularly Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, and Turkey. Muslim laymen often present Islamic instruction and even sermons (Achouri 2013). In most cities, we find a plurality of mosques, with links to a particular country of origin, even if they accept Muslims of different backgrounds for prayer. Courses for children are usually offered for free, whereas courses for adult require fees. Here is an example from the website of the “Mosquée de Paris”:

### Apprentissage du Coran

Les études coraniques sont assurées SAMEDI et DIMANCHE matin de 10h00 à 12h00 par des Imams en deux niveaux. Ces cours sont dispensés gratuitement.

Cours de langue arabe et instruction islamique destinés aux jeunes. Les cours sont dispensés le MERCREDI et SAMEDI dans trois classes dirigées par des professeurs qualifiés et expérimentés dans le domaine pédagogique.

<http://www.mosqueedeparis.net/linstitut-musulman/activites/activites-culturelles/>

Striking, when compared to Germany, is the amount and the aesthetic quality of books, guides for parents and other didactic materials for Islamic religious education in France. Amazon France, for instance, offers 917 books and other materials for “Islam pour les enfants”. There are also computer-aided programmes for children (e. g. [http://lepetit-erudit.zxq.net/new\\_page\\_2222222op258852op1.htm](http://lepetit-erudit.zxq.net/new_page_2222222op258852op1.htm)). The ads say that a book is “presented by a parent”, or that is has “très jolie design”. Some books stand out for their colourful covers and inviting approaches. Looking at bookshops in France (this is a rather impressionistic personal observation), it is interesting that Muslim book titles and Quran editions are often on sale on the same bookshelves on religion, together with Catholic books. The bible lies besides the Quran (see picture).



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Thus religious education in France, for Muslims as for other faiths, is much more a task for parents and civil society, and less state organized. It is very decentralized, as it is typical for civil society in France in general, in contrast to the organized corporatist system in Germany.

## 6. RESUMÉ

Although it is difficult to assess the amount of religious education in France, and there are no comprehensive statistics, it is evident that there is a gap between the position and activity range of the established religions (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish) and the Muslim communities in both countries. This applies particularly to the number of private religious schools in France and to religious instruction in Germany. In both countries, the state intervened and urged Muslim communities to form representative bodies. The state wanted to find partners for consultation, recognition and pacification, in sight of terrorist attacks and a worsening image of Islam in the public sphere.

Looking at the curricula for Islamic religious education in Germany, in Hessen as well as in other *Länder*, we can see that religious education is conceived largely parallel to Protestant and Catholic religious education as they are understood today. Dogmatic problems and ideas take a back seat, and interreligious tolerance, social responsibility and interpersonal relations have a prominent place. Moreover, the status of Jewish and Christian prophets in Islam is stressed. Everything is put into a didactic language.

In contrast to this, religious teaching in France is left to the parents, civil society and also to mosques funded by the countries of origin of the immigrants. In this situation, parents seem to feel a need for children's information on Islam and its legends and stories, and writers and publishers seem to develop much fantasy and energy to satisfy these needs. It helps that Muslims in France speak more and more French even in their mosques whereas Islam in Germany is still largely practised in Turkish (Halm et al. 2012).

In both countries, the situation is dynamic and in flux. Given the mounting presence of Islamist terrorism and its appeal to some young people in Western countries, of immigrant as well as of indigenous origin, governments and the public will ever more feel a need for an Islamic education that is in line with liberal democratic and humanistic values, and furthers a tolerant living together. At the same time, the non-Islamic public needs to know more about Islam, and Muslims about Christianity, Judaism and Non-Believers. Consequently, in the years to come there will be more interest about teaching religion in France, Germany, and other countries. It would enrich the discourse if the public knew more about the concepts, problems and achievements in neighbouring European countries (see also Hanf/ Mufti 2014; Jackson et al. 2007). However, religion in European countries will continue to be organized differently. Local and national traditions and identities, changing life styles, transnational contacts will influence the way religion and religious instruction is organized.

In all religions, there are traditions of the *regula aurea*, or golden rule: Treat others, as you want to be treated yourself. What I want you to do to me, I shall do to you. It is the basis for Kant's categorical imperative, the basis of modern Philosophy. Thus there is common ground to develop practices that further a living together where the "other" is valued and appreciated, whatever s/he believes.

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Examples for Mosque websites about Muslim religious instruction:

<http://www.mosquee-annemasse.org/activites/catechisme-musulman.html>

<http://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Actualite/A-Argenteuil-une-ecole-pour-former-des-musulmans-et-citoyens- NG -2012-03-13-777919>

<http://www.mosqueedeparis.net/linstitut-musulman/activites/activites-culturelles/>