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Foreword

Ever since the devastating terror attacks of 9/11, Islam and Muslims have been increasingly perceived by a broad cross-section of European societies as an exclusive problem of home politics. This underlying idea of securitization is clearly expressed in the long list of charges that Muslims of different religious, ethnic, linguistic or national backgrounds and allegiances have been regularly facing in the media over a long period of time. The reference to Islamist terrorism is repeatedly used to maintain the alleged lack of a distinct and clearly perceivable dividing line between Islam proper and radical Islamism.

Commentators tend to state again and again, that Islam has never experienced anything analogous to the Reformation and Enlightenment periods and therefore seems hardly compatible with democracy and pluralism. This so-called fact is supposed to be visible in a number of everyday conflicts that Islam is usually blamed for in a rather undifferentiated and sweeping manner. The examples that are dealt with at length in the media, run from school conflicts, for example, to the refusal to participate in sports or swimming lessons within a co-educational setting, or the rampant anti-Semitism within groups of Muslim adolescents, culminating in cases of so-called murders of honour. The perspective of these reports is generally critical towards Islam and frequently come to the conclusion that Islamic everyday culture as practiced in Europe has to be seen as an obstacle to integration and therefore urgently needs to be reformed. A closer view however, reveals common problems specifically related to minority groups and integration rather than a propensity to some sort of culturalism. An empirical study on “Milieus among people with migration backgrounds in Germany” published by Sinus Sociovision in October 2007, for example, clearly falsifies the standard stereotype concerning migrants’ rationality in Germany as being preliminary determined by their religion.

Muslim communities and associations have a difficult time responding adequately to such charges that smack of colonial civilizing mission. Some criticisms however that address religiously motivated conflicts in schools, or anti-semitism cannot be dismissed so easily and have moved representatives of Muslim associations to agree that some forms of behaviour in schools and homes that have been supposedly influenced by Islamic ideas are not legitimate and therefore require a necessary response. But what exactly ought to be done and who should do it? Public debate has been shaped very much by these problem complexes so prominently singled out by a media coverage that is mainly produced by non-Muslim authors.

With the publication of the revised proceedings of an International Workshop entitled, "Islam in Europe" held in November 2011 by the Area Study Center for Europe, University of Karachi in collaboration with the Hanns Seidel Foundation, Islamabad, the editor of this volume, Prof. Moonis Ahmar, fills a gap severely felt in Muslim majority countries: Knowledge about Muslims and Islam in Europe is quite underrepresented in the study rooms of South Asian university, while the information provided on the topic to a wider public by public media is usually prone to polemics, one-sided depiction of a highly complex phenomena and which calls for solidarization with Muslim minorities in the West.

The book underscores the fact that Muslim communities in Europe are highly diverse and even contesting in nature and therefore tough to be streamlined in secular constitutional nation states. Only lately, with the advent of new integration policies the various Muslim communities have come to be addressed as serious partners in terms of how institutional formation, agency and normativity are to be created and evolved that are supposed to be more compatible with European society: a number of tasks have been envisaged to provide some kind of a framework for a top-down approach for working through the sketched complex network of problems. The declared ultimate goal of all of these attempted interventions is the development of moderate, naturalized,

homogenized, “national” Islams, which are to be completely integrated into and absorbed by a democratic and pluralist society. However, no one at the moment seems able to concretely spell out what exactly this set aim will entail or how it is to be achieved. For a long time Muslims in Europe were strictly organized on ethnic and national lines, the backyard mosque being a centre for the memorization of ethnicity and endowed with migrant-specific features. These ethnic borders are gradually being replaced – not the least in a complex process of othering by the majority societies - by a deterritorialized Islamic identity with a representative sacred space. The integration process is thereby highly Islamized.

It is with the view of this emerging scenario that the present volume wants to highlight diachronous and synchronous perspectives from a variety of scholars. As such the book in hand will seriously add to the knowledge of readers in Muslim majority countries and account for mutual understanding which is most important to do justice to a highly sensitive and contested field of discourse.

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