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## **Religious Organizations as Political Actors in the Context of Migration: Islam and Orthodoxy in Austria**

### **Abstract**

This paper investigates how immigration and concerns over immigrant integration are changing the established modes of cooperation between church and state in Austria. Focusing on the relationship between officially recognised Muslim and Eastern Orthodox organizations and the state, we examine how the mounting politicization of immigrant integration has led the state to collaborate with minority religious organizations as representatives of immigrants and is increasing the opportunities for Muslim and Eastern Orthodox groups to be visible and express voice in the public sphere. Basing our argument on interviews, policy documents and literature, we analyze how this thematic expansion of issues is transforming the modes of cooperation between religious organizations and the state from a narrow and institutionalised collaboration on policy issues exclusively related to religion to a broader but more fluid and uncertain form of symbolic cooperation. We argue that within this modified setting recognised minority religious organizations are gradually assuming the function of political entrepreneurs who speak in the name of the entire immigrant community. This, in turn, creates tensions within and between religious groups, and risks to overstate religion as a factor in the integration of immigrants. Our comparison between Muslim and Eastern Orthodox religious organizations shows that, notwithstanding the greater salience of Islam, they both benefit from the new stress of religion in integration issues.

**Keywords:**

Immigrant integration, religious governance, Austria, church-state relations, religious actors

## **1) Introduction**

In recent times Europe has been experiencing a revival of religion in public life. Religious issues have become more politicised and religion has gained increased prominence in politics. (Foret and Itçaina 2008; Katzenstein 2006; Katzenstein and Byrnes 2006; Koenig 2005, 2007). This has prompted a number of social science studies in the area of religious governance (among others: Bader 2007; Fetzer and Soper 2004; Maussen 2007). What remains relatively underexplored, however, is the fact that the revival of religion in public life has often been accompanied by the emergence and strengthening of the role of religious organizations as actors within the political system. This is especially the case for minority activism, since the existence of religious and cultural tensions involving immigrants in Europe (in particular Muslims) increases the need for cooperation among minority religious organizations and state authorities (see: Klausen 2005). Some research on the strengthening of the political role of Muslim religious organizations has already been carried out for a number of countries in Europe (Cesari and McLoughlin 2005; Maréchal et al. 2003). However, in this research context Austria and the role of other minority religions, for instance the Orthodox Christians, are under-researched topics.

The Austrian political system has been characterised by an inclusive model of religious governance where recognised religious organizations are treated as institutional partners of the state in religious affairs and are entitled to rights, resources, and privileges (Abid 2006; Potz 1996). Given the present revival of religion in public life, this explicitly political role of minority religious organizations is being expanded to a number of new issues. Minority religious organizations are called upon to participate in political initiatives and debates as well as to mediate conflicts that do not touch upon religion directly, but rather upon the cultural and socio-economic integration of immigrants. Thus, besides being institutional partners to the state in matters of the free exercise of religion in private and

public realms, religious organizations are now increasingly being addressed by state officials as experts in immigrant integration and as representatives of immigrants.

In the last decades, the number of immigrants to Austria has risen steadily, transforming it into a de facto country of immigration and religious diversity. In 2007, over 16 per cent of the population were considered to have a ‘migration background’, that is, were either born abroad or did not possess Austrian citizenship despite having been born in the country (Statistik Austria 2007). These numbers notwithstanding, Austrian policies of immigrant integration remain among the strictest in Europe (Niessen et al. 2007) and the policy-field of integration is a very young one. Immigrant integration has proved to be highly controversial and especially Muslim immigrants are targeted by a public discourse that sees Islam as a reason for non-integration (Rohe 2006; Wets 2006).

In this paper, we choose to focus on two specific minority religious groups: Muslims and Orthodox Christians. Besides being the third and fourth largest religious groups in Austria after the Catholic and Protestant denominations, they are also the religious denominations which have the largest percentage of immigrants among their followers (see table 1).

**(Table 1 about here)**

Islam is the third biggest religious community in Austria after Catholics and Protestants (Statistik Austria 2001). According to the 2001 census approximately 4.2 per cent of the total population belongs to the Islamic faith and 34 per cent of the population without Austrian citizenship declare themselves as Muslims (ibid). Most Muslim immigrants are of Turkish origin and came to the country as ‘guest workers’ (*Gastarbeiter*), that is, temporary workers, and through family reunification. Another important source of Muslim immigration

to Austria was the Yugoslavian War in the 1990s when a great number of Bosnian refugees fled to this country.

The second most important religion among the immigrant population is Orthodoxy. According to the last census (Statistik Austria 2001), in the year 2001, 2.2 per cent of the total population belonged to an Orthodox confession. Although the presence of Orthodox Christians dates back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the majority of Orthodox living in Austria today has come to this country as labour immigrants. The largest group of Orthodox, the Serbian-Orthodox, arrived also as *Gastarbeiter* accompanied by family members, as well as the major part of the Syrian-Orthodox, who came from Turkey. Labour migration is most certainly the dominant motive also for Orthodox immigrants from South-Eastern Europe after 1989. Although there is no official data documenting the growth in the Orthodox population,<sup>1</sup> it is generally believed that the numbers of Orthodox believers in Austria rose significantly after the fall of the iron curtain (interview 2 and 5).

Up until very recently, Muslims and Orthodox Christians were commonly identified as one group experiencing similar problems in integrating into Austrian society both in political and in social terms. Examples of such problems include legal hurdles for family reunification and the acquisition of citizenship, the lack of German language competence within their communities, limitations on the job market and difficulties for the second and third generation in the educational system (Fassmann 2007; Weiss 2007). With the growing politicization of Islam since the 1980s and with the onset of the wars in former Yugoslavia, the religious diversity of the generic category *Gastarbeiter* acquired new salience (Warner and Wenner 2006: 462). Also for the migrants themselves religion began to play an increasingly important role as a marker of identity (Schiffauer 1988, 2007). By the beginning of the new millennium, two initially separate problematics – the integration of immigrants and the governance of religious diversity – had thus become intrinsically related.

Based on the comparative analysis of Muslim and Orthodox Christians, this paper analyses how the political role of religious organizations is changing due to the politicization of immigrant integration. Firstly, we investigate how the emergence of the policy-field of immigrant integration is increasing the opportunities for officially recognised minority religious organizations to be visible and express voice in the public sphere. Our main thesis is that the role of minority religious organizations in Austria is expanding from being institutional partners of the state in religious affairs to being, in addition, representatives of immigrants. Secondly, as the cooperation expands we observe that there is a corresponding change in the modes of cooperation between religious organizations and the state. We argue that in the area of immigrant integration the interaction between the state and officially recognised organizations is characterized by a more fluid and uncertain form of symbolic cooperation than in the institutionalised collaboration on policy issues exclusively related to religion. Thirdly, the paper analyzes the impact that processes of political involvement have on the religious groups themselves in terms of their position within the political system, their self-understanding as social actors, and in terms of their internal cohesion and representativeness. The paper is based on interviews with national representatives of officially recognized religious organizations and political leaders as well as policy documents and literature. Although we are aware that integration policies often take place at provincial and local level, we concentrate on the federal level of Austrian politics, since a thorough examination of all relevant levels and actors would extrapolate the scope of this paper.

## **2) The Austrian System of Religious Governance**

Established typologies of systems of church-state relations distinguish between constitutional establishment and non-establishment, whereby the latter can be further subdivided into

separatist countries and selective cooperation countries (Robbers 1996). Austria is a prototypical system of selective cooperation (Madeley 2003: 13-16; Potz 1996: 235; Robbers 1996: 324) characterized by an institutional separation between church and state. This means that the state refrains from interference with internal affairs of religious organizations and vice-versa, nevertheless the state cooperates regularly and institutionally with selected religious bodies. On the basis of institutional separation and selective cooperation, the Austrian state officially recognises thirteen communities<sup>2</sup> as ‘privileged corporations of public law’ and grants them several legal privileges including direct and indirect subsidies from the state. The main organizations of officially recognised religious communities<sup>3</sup> are quasi-public bodies with whom the Austrian state negotiates all matters related to religion. The legal instrument that allows for cooperation is the Law of Recognition (*Anerkennungsgesetz*) dating from 1874.

For these reasons, the Austrian model of religious governance can be considered a inclusionary one; a model in which the state and several religious organizations cooperate regularly and institutionally (Kalb et al. 2003). However, this inclusionary model of religious governance is not the product of a policy of multicultural accommodation of ethnic and religious diversity by the modern democratic state, but rather a historical inheritance from the times of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Therefore, under conditions of increased immigration and of a revival of religion in public life, the Austrian model is being put to a test.

### *2.1) Recognition and Representation of Islam in Austria*

Austria is one of the few European countries that formally recognise Islam as an official religion. Although in several other countries informal arrangements exist that translate into a special status for the Muslim community (see for instance the founding of the *Deutsche Islamkonferenz* in 2006 in Germany and of the *Conseil français du culte Musulman* in 2003 in

France), Islam is otherwise only formally recognised as an official religion in Belgium since 1974 (Kanmaz 2002) and since recently also in Spain and Croatia, where bilateral agreements have been signed by the Islamic communities and the state in 1992 and 2002 respectively (Moreras 2002; U.S. Department of State 2004). In Austria, recognition of Islam dates from 1912 when the Austro-Hungarian Empire had a strongly multiethnic and multi-religious character and included a great number of Bosnian Muslims, Jews and Orthodox Christians among its subjects. After the end of the Empire, the legal provisions that allowed for the recognition of Islam became dormant, since there was no significant percentage of Muslims among the population. Not until the 1970s, at a time when the number of Muslims living in Austria was still relatively low, did an active group of Muslims raise claims for the creation of an Islamic organization on the basis of these provisions. In 1979 the *Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich* (Islamic Faith Community in Austria, hereafter referred to by the German acronym IGGiÖ) managed to acquire official recognition, hence gaining access to all the rights, resources and privileges attached to this legal status (Kroissenbrunner 2003). The IGGiÖ is considered by law to be the religious representative of all Muslims present in the Austrian territory (Schmied 2005: 193). Interestingly, despite the fact that there are many currents within Islam<sup>4</sup>, only one organization is recognised by the Austrian state as an official representative of the entire Muslim community.

Only more recently, however, has the IGGiÖ expanded its activities from being a representative of Islamic faith to acting as spokesperson of Muslims more generally. This 'entrance into politics' by the IGGiÖ is linked to events surrounding the imposition of 'sanctions' against Austria by the EU in reaction to the formation of a government-coalition in the year 2000, which included the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) of Jörg Haider, a far-right anti-immigration party (for details see: Hummer and Pelinka 2002). The EU decided to install a commission of three distinguished persons to evaluate the necessity of these measures.



These experts met with government officials, representatives of political parties and of the judiciary, as well as with civil society and religious organizations in order to gather information for their report (Ahtisaari et al. 2000: 35-39). The representatives of the IGGiÖ started a ‘lobbying campaign’, contacting repeatedly both the government and the EU representatives in order to ask for an appointment (Interview 4). This campaign was eventually successful and the IGGiÖ was able to contribute to the report of the three experts.

The consultations with the three EU envoys provided an opportunity for the Muslim leadership to carve a new role for itself in the political arena and to increase its visibility. More than that, the leadership of the IGGiÖ sees this as *the* moment in which they acquired a voice in the Austrian political system and in the media (Interview 4). Since then, they started being invited to round-table discussions on television and to consultations with the government on new legislations concerning migration. Despite the pronounced anti-immigration tendencies of the coalition partner FPÖ (Wodak and Reisigl 2000), the government showed an interest in collaborating with religious minorities, at least partially in order to demonstrate to the EU that it had democratic and pluralistic credentials. The government therefore was very active in inviting religious minorities for debates and events of different kinds, for instance the *Imame-Konferenz* organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004 and 2005 and various conferences during Austria’s EU Presidency in 2006.

### *2.3) Recognition and Representation of Orthodoxy in Austria*

The Orthodox religion as such was first officially recognised in Austria in 1874 and the different Orthodox Churches acquired the status of a corporation of public law in 1967. In the Orthodox tradition, the church is not an intrinsically transnational institution but rather closely tied to the state and to the nation (Katzenstein and Byrnes 2006: 685-86). It is made up of independent (autocephalous) churches, each headed by a patriarch. The law of 1967

*(Orthodoxengesetz)* takes into account the different strands of contemporary Orthodoxy and its evolving nature. It gives legal status to the different churches of the Byzantine-Greek and Slavic tradition and provides for the inclusion of additional Orthodox Churches, such that, in 1969 the Russian- and Bulgarian-Orthodox Churches and in 2003 the Oriental-Orthodox Churches were also recognised. For historical reasons the patriarch of Constantinople enjoys a symbolically privileged status among the other patriarchs (*primus inter pares*). The *Orthodoxengesetz* turns this symbolic primacy into a legal one and gives direct privileged status to the diocese under the patriarch of Constantinople. Thus, the Greek-Oriental Metropolis of Austria has a representative function for all the Orthodox in the country and it also acts as a ‘gatekeeper’, having the last word on the recognition of additional Orthodox Churches. The Metropolitan acts as a spokesperson for the Orthodox community in consultations with the government and with the other churches and he is also responsible for the curriculum for religious education in schools (Interview 2).

All the Orthodox Churches are members of the Austrian Ecumenical Council, the umbrella organisation of the Christian Churches. Through the Ecumenical Council, the Orthodox share in the strong voice which the Catholic Church continues to have in Austrian politics and they also profit from the established patterns of cooperation and information between the government and the majority religious organizations. This represents a great difference from the Muslims who, as we have seen, had to lobby for acquiring voice in the political system.

### **3) Religious Organizations as Representatives of Immigrants**

In this section we will analyze how the role of religious minority organizations in the public sphere is changing. In addition to being institutional partners in religious affairs, they are

increasingly being addressed by the government as representatives of immigrants in the emerging policy-field of immigrant integration. We also investigate the effects that this thematic expansion has on the form of cooperation. We find that the highly formalised and institutionalised form of cooperation between the state and religious organizations is being complemented by more fluid and symbolic forms of cooperation in the area of immigrant integration. Lastly, we cite evidence that in light of the politicization of immigrant integration representatives of minority religions become increasingly involved in party-politics.

### *3.1) From Institutional Partners in Religious Affairs to Representatives of Immigrants*

The established system of church-state relations in Austria postulates an institutionalized cooperation between the political sphere and religious bodies. At the level of public policies, recognized religious organizations play an explicitly political role. They are consulted in the law-making process on issues that are protected by the principle of freedom of religion. This includes the negotiation of specific claims by minority religions to be granted legal exceptions to accommodate specific practices and ways of life related to religion (e.g. religious regulations on slaughtering, the wearing of religious dress, the building of places of worship), as well as all matters related to the exercise of public functions by religious organizations (e.g. religious instruction) (Khorchide 2008; Potz 1996).

This kind of formalized policy cooperation has played a crucial role in solving social and political tensions related to religious diversity. In such cases, which primarily concern Muslim practices, the state and the religious organizations that represent minority communities show an equally strong interest in collaborating to solve the tensions and prevent conflict. A recent example for the effectiveness of this form of governance of religious diversity is the regulation of the right of Muslim women to wear a headscarf. In Austria, where Muslims had always been allowed to wear their religiously prescribed dress in public

schools, the issue of the Islamic headscarf did not escalate as in other European countries. Nevertheless, in 2004 a controversy did arise over some students' headscarf because the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), influenced by similar polemics in Germany and France, called for a prohibition of the veil in schools. The Ministry of Education, after negotiating with representatives of the IGGiÖ, issued a decree establishing a non-restrictive approach in the state school-system (Abid 2006: 269-71).<sup>5</sup> The decree states that the wearing of a headscarf by Muslim students shall be identified as a religious dress code and therefore is to be protected by constitutional principles. Thus we see how, in the case of controversies surrounding the veil, social and political tensions could be eased by framing the issue as a religious question and appealing to the established rules of religious governance. Through the collaboration between the government and the IGGiÖ, an appropriate policy to deal with the issue could be found. The problem was negotiated as a religious issue, not as an integration issue (Gresch et al. 2008).

Besides this traditional form of policy cooperation in issues related to religion, we observe a thematic expansion of topics addressed by cooperation between religious organizations and the state, including ever more frequently issues and activities that go beyond purely religious concerns. This thematic expansion refers primarily to the field of immigrant integration, where minority religious organizations are increasingly being addressed as representatives of immigrant communities.

A clear indicator of this dynamic was the involvement of religious groups in a debate launched by the government about integration in 2007. Following a controversial discussion instigated by a government-sponsored report about the alleged 'unwillingness to integrate' of Muslim immigrants in Austrian society (Rohe 2006), the Federal Ministry of Interior initiated the so-called *Integrationsplattform*.<sup>6</sup> The objective of the *Integrationsplattform* was a dialogue with civil society in order to improve the conditions for integration of foreigners.

Representatives of five legally recognised religious societies were invited to participate. Of these, the Catholic and Protestant representatives stood out as experts on integration-issues due to their experience in the NGO-work of *Caritas* and *Diakonie*, whereas the Muslim and Orthodox participants appeared as representatives of those groups that were the primary target of the dialogue.

Further activities in which religious organizations assume a renewed political role include situations in which religious leaders act as mediators between members of their community, Austrian politics, and society more generally. Immigrants in general, and increasingly non-Christian immigrants, have been repeatedly targeted by insulting slogans and campaigns of right-wing populist parties in Austria. Xenophobic discourses have been widespread in Austrian politics for a long time (Wodak and Reisigl 2000), but recently these discourses are taking on explicitly religious connotations. In particular, the two far-right parties in Austria, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), are increasingly adopting anti-Islamic paroles in their campaigns (Rosenberger and Hadj-Abdou 2008). The important mediating role of religious organizations in this political context could be observed during the campaign of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) for the local elections in the city of Graz in January 2008. During this campaign, the main candidate of the FPÖ to the local assembly, Susanne Winter, created an enormous polemic by calling the prophet Mohammed a ‘child abuser’ and saying that the Koran was written during ‘epileptic fits’. The website of the FPÖ further quotes Mrs. Winter as saying that those parties who argue for multiculturalism plan nothing else but ‘mass immigration, foreign infiltration (*Überfremdung*), and Islamization’ (<http://www.fpoe-graz.at/>).<sup>7</sup>

On that occasion the IGGiÖ reports that it had to make considerable efforts to demobilise and convince its members not to organise any protests against the candidacy of Mrs. Winter. Muslim leaders went from Mosque to Mosque arguing that the offending statements

had already been sufficiently criticized by the Austrian government and that it was better to avoid aggravating tensions by taking to the streets, which could end up creating a backlash and benefiting Mrs. Winter's campaign (Interview 4). The importance of the mediating role of the IGGiÖ in this event was corroborated by a leading political figure, according to whom the absence of protests and the ability of the Muslim leadership to control its community was the ultimate proof that the specific Austrian model of religious governance based on cooperation works (Interview 1).

### *3.2) Symbolic Cooperation*

The shift from being institutional partners of the government in religious affairs to representing immigrants also implies a change in the predominant modes of cooperation between the government and the minority religious organizations. While, when concerned with religious issues, cooperation is based on a formalised set of rights, resources and privileges, it becomes more fluid and symbolic in issues related to migration and integration. By symbolic cooperation we mean modes of interaction between politics and minority religions that aim at fostering a constructive atmosphere of dialogue without necessarily having any direct public policy impact.

Symbolic cooperation has become especially important in recent years due to the mounting religiously motivated international conflicts that have the potential to reverberate in different national settings. Often, symbolic cooperation between the state and religious organizations takes place in order to prevent or at least minimise the eruption of conflicts related to minority religions. A particularly poignant example of this was the case of the Mohammed cartoons in Denmark in 2006, an event that spread to many other countries in Europe, creating tensions between several immigrant Muslims communities and their host societies. The Austrian government, which held the EU Presidency at that time, undertook

two initiatives to mediate the conflict. It organised a 'religious summit' with Austrian religious leaders at the chancellor's office, and it held an informal meeting with Danish representatives and Muslim leaders from Bosnia, Syria and Austria (Demokratiezentrum Wien 2008). In both occasions, the government emphasised that the long established Austrian model of dialogue and religious toleration could show a way out of the crisis (ORF 2006).

Although symbolic cooperation increases the visibility of religious organizations, it does not offer the same degree of policy influence as the formalized cooperation on religious issues discussed before. Religious organizations possess no legal right to be consulted on immigration issues and the other matters that are the object of the instances of symbolic cooperation described in this paper. The decision to consult religious organizations and the definition of the agenda are therefore largely in the hands of state authorities. Moreover, even when the religious organizations are consulted, the impact of their contribution is unclear, since the government is not bound to take the views of religious organizations into account.

The limited impact of symbolic cooperation on public policies is corroborated by the results of the *Integrationsplattform*. At this occasion, the leaders of the five religious communities involved had produced a joint document stating their common position on immigration and integration. They had demanded facilitated rules for family reunification, work permits for everyone legally resident in Austria, and the right to vote in local and regional elections for long-term residents (KathPress 2008). When the Minister of Interior presented the alleged outcome of the *Integrationsplattform* in January 2008, a document entitled 'strategy for integration' (Integrationsstrategie 2008), the first reaction of the representatives of religious organizations and non-governmental organizations was disappointment, because the document showed hardly any traces of the dialogue that had been initiated for its elaboration (Der Standard 2008b). This suggests that symbolic cooperation may sometimes be used as a self-legitimizing strategy by the government.

Another result of symbolic cooperation is the paradoxical effect of linking minority religions to problems of integration. Many immigrants are afflicted by a lack of political and social inclusion and economic deprivation. Most immigrants do not possess Austrian citizenship, which makes the officially recognised religious organizations one of their few channels for representation. Of the communities studied in this paper only a minority has citizenship. In 2001, 71.1 per cent of Muslims and 77.2 per cent of Orthodox believers did not possess Austrian citizenship (see table 1). Against this background, representation by the officially recognised religious organizations becomes an important means for Muslim and Orthodox immigrants to participate in the political process (Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger 2008). This situation has, on the one hand, the indirect effect of strengthening the role of religious organizations in the public sphere, as these organizations are increasingly called upon to participate in political cooperation processes in order to help solve these problems. On the other hand, the fact that minority religions are increasingly being associated with the problems of supposedly 'non-integrated' immigrants contributes to the view that religion is responsible for non-integration, or at least a factor that hinders integration into the secular Austrian society.

### *3.3) Involvement in party-politics*

As the field of immigrant integration is becoming more politicized, religious leaders as representatives of immigrants are getting increasingly involved in party politics. For instance one of our interviewees, Mr. Omar Al-Rawi, is both speaker for integration affairs of the IGGiÖ and member of the Assembly of the City of Vienna for the Social-Democratic Party. Similarly, our interviews have shown that also religious leaders who do not hold political positions are well connected to political parties and actors (Interview 1, Interview 3).



Furthermore, the established political parties are beginning to see the immigrant community as potential voters by the main political parties. For instance, for the last national election the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) produced campaign material also in Turkish and Serbo-Croatian (see: <http://www.werner-faymann.at/>). Turkish immigrants were also mentioned during the interview we held with a senior politician of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP): "180.000 Turkish Sunni live in Austria. (...) These are people who want to stay. They do not want to leave again. They want to vote and be citizens." (Interview 1: 10:50-11:20) In the same interview, we were also told that it was a declared goal to include immigrant representation in the agenda of parties in order to prevent, in the long run, the foundation of political parties on ethnic or religious bases.

Political actors (both in the government and in opposition) appeal to specific religious groups in order to gain support for their own political agenda. This was clearly the case during the last national election campaign, where the far-right party FPÖ took a pro-Serbian stand in the controversies surrounding the independence of Kosovo, while at the same time reinforcing its image as an anti-Islam party. This strategy to win the votes of the Serbian community and of Orthodox believers more generally was evaluated ambiguously (supported by some, rejected by others) by our Orthodox interview partners (Interview 3, Interview 5, see also: Der Standard 2008a).

#### **4) Internal Impacts: Tensions Within and Between Religious Organizations**

So far we have seen how the Austrian model of religious governance is changing. But how do these transformations affect the religious organizations themselves? It is important to note before tackling these questions that the two groups we are dealing with in this paper are internally highly heterogeneous, both with respect to religious currents and to national or ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, not only are the communities ethnically diverse, but also the

ties of each ethnic group to their region are usually very strong, not least because many members are still citizens of their countries of origin (Kraler and Sohler 2005). It is also important to point out that, whereas these two groups can be considered similar cases due to their internal heterogeneity, they are most different cases where their organizational structure is concerned. In the case of the Orthodox, the internal heterogeneity of the group is formally reflected in its autocephalous organizational structure, so that almost each theological strand or national community has its own independent representation. By contrast, all different strands of Islam and all of its ethnic communities are united under one single organization, the IGGiÖ.

Within this context, we identify two major effects that the changes in the religious governance in Austria have on the religious organizations. The first is heightened internal and inter-denominational tensions within and between the communities as a result of their increased visibility, enlarged public role of some religious leaders, and intensified cooperation with the state. The second is a reconstruction of the community's identity by religious leaders, who attempt to avoid discriminatory stigmatization by positioning themselves strategically within a changing discursive landscape in which the 'Other' is alternatively constructed either as the foreigner or as the religious other.

#### *4.1) Internal and inter-denominational tensions*

The increased public role of religion exacerbates internal divisions and powers struggles within the religious organizations themselves. As the cooperation between religious organizations and the state intensifies, so does the pressure on the religious organizations to be truly representative of their community. In order to maintain the cooperation with the state, minority religious organizations must demonstrate that they do in fact speak for the whole community, and that they are reliable partners who can guarantee that the outcome of

negotiations with the state will be upheld. This demand for cohesion and representativeness contrasts with the internal heterogeneity of the religious communities in question and with the presence of a large number of established minority networks and associations, which are left out of the cooperation between the government and the officially established religious representations (Kraler and Sohler 2005).<sup>8</sup> Internally, this creates a need for homogenization of the community, as the pressure increases for religious groups to be able to ‘speak with one voice’ (Schiffauer 2007). When this is not manageable, contestation along the lines of nationality, ethnicity and religious strands increase.

In the case of the Muslim community, such rising tensions are exemplified by increasing complaints of the Alevi and the Shia, who do not feel adequately represented by the IGGiÖ (see, for instance, Beig 2006). Moreover, questions are raised as to the legitimacy of the leadership of the IGGiÖ, who is chosen in an indirect election where each national community has a specific number of votes. In particular, the Turkish community feels under-represented, since despite being the largest Muslim group among the Austrian population they do not have the majority of votes within the IGGiÖ (Interview 4). Also in the case of the Orthodox, we have found that the authority of the Greek Metropolitan is being put into question by the Russian and by the Serbian Orthodox Churches (Interviews 2, 3 and 5).

Moreover, the heightened political influence of religious organizations increases tensions between minority religious communities. The increased political role of religious organizations leads to competition between them for influence and visibility. Thus, although all religious organizations get strengthened due to the general anxiety about Islam and the impulse that this gives to the dialogue between religion and state, the predominance of Islam also creates some discomfort and generates the feeling among religious minorities that they are a ‘religious minority of second rank’ as expressed by some Orthodox leaders. The sentiment is voiced that the Orthodox believers are in a disadvantaged position with respect to

Muslims because their demands are considered less urgent (Interview 2 and 5). One of our interviewees said: ‘Islam enjoys special treatment. I do not think that is right (...) From the Jewish and the Muslim side, a concrete political pressure is being exerted on the government. The government wants to avoid this pressure and it always gives in immediately. We [the Orthodox] are different. We are people who seek a second home in Austria. We do not blackmail anyone.’ (Interview 2)

In the light of these findings, it seems fair to say that although the symbolic modes of cooperation between religion and state in Austria are meant to ease social tensions and mitigate religiously motivated disputes, they are at the same time more conflict-prone than the traditional issue-limited formalised institutional cooperation, in that they foster tensions between and within religious groups.

#### *4.2) Identity construction*

In addition to increasing internal and inter-denominational tensions, we have also found that the recent developments of the Austrian model of religious governance have impacted the self-portrayal of religious organizations. As recent studies on group identity and ethnicity-making show, the identity of an ethnic or religious group is not pre-defined but rather the result of an ongoing “process of *constituting* and *re-configuring* groups by defining the boundaries between them” (Wimmer 2008: 1027, emphasis in the original). In line with this claim, we observed that the increased visibility of religious organizations caused by intensified cooperation provided an opportunity for religious leaders to reposition themselves in the discursive landscape by strategically constructing the identity of their religious community to avoid being identified as the Other.

In the case of Muslim leaders, religious entrepreneurs see a chance to position themselves within the migration debate as ‘good citizens’ and as ‘pro-Austria’ and ‘pro-

integration'. Although Muslim leaders recognise that they do represent a large number of immigrants, they do not portray themselves as leaders of an organization of immigrants but rather of well-integrated Muslim Austrian citizens (Interview 4). Thus, Muslim leaders try to shift the 'anti-foreigner-debate' back from a religiously polarised one to one in which the foreigner or the 'un-integrated' foreigner is the 'Other' and not the Muslim or the religious person as such. As Casanova (2006: 77) points out, Muslims are often a source of anxiety in the West 'not only because of their religious otherness as a non-Christian and non-European religion, but more importantly because of their religiousness itself as the "other" of European secularity.' By emphasizing the dichotomy between integrated and non-integrated immigrants rather than between Muslims and non-Muslims or between religious and secular, the Muslim leadership therefore attempts to escape these anxieties caused by the discursively constructed religious Otherness of Muslims.

The Orthodox Churches, on the other hand, take a quite different position. Although they too emphasise that they represent a community of well-integrated and Austria-loving citizens, at the same time they see in the heightened visibility of religion in the public sphere a chance to present themselves as good Christians, adding to those voices that construct the Muslims as the Others of Europe. Orthodox leaders stress the Christian roots of Europe and of the whole project of European integration. In the words of one of our interviewees: 'We [Orthodox immigrants] integrate easily. (...) We come to Christian Europe. (...) We are under Christians in Europe; this is our home. We do not see ourselves as temporary workers (*Gastarbeiter*), aliens (*Fremde*) or foreigners (*Ausländer*); we are native Christians in Europe.' (Interview 3, 4:13 – 5:00)

## **5) Conclusion**

One of the most important findings of this paper is that immigration and heightened concerns about integration contribute to a strengthening of the role of faith-based minority organizations in the public sphere. Established modes of cooperation are strengthened and new opportunities for religious entrepreneurs to become more active in political processes are opened up. This benefits not only the immigrant religious communities, but also the established Christian Churches, which can demonstrate expertise in interfaith-dialogue. Immigration can create both social and cultural tensions that, in the name of social peace, call for mediation and lead to a further inclusion of religious organizations into the political realm.

Nevertheless, the predominance of dialogue rather than institutional cooperation on issues of integration means that the relations between religious actors and the state in Austria are becoming much more fluid, less formalised, and more politicised. Cooperation in areas related to migration creates a tendency towards more symbolic rather than corporative modes of cooperation. Symbolic cooperation based on an atmosphere of dialogue and mutual exchange may, however, have very little impact on policy outcomes. As the empirical evidence provided above shows, symbolic cooperation may be more about performing unity than about negotiating concrete political compromises. Within the framework of symbolic cooperation, state authorities see religious organisations not as institutional partners with a right to consultation, but as a resource for fostering the image of integration and social peace.

As we have seen in the case of the EU expert report, participation in these informal and symbolic levels of cooperation is often dependent on the ability of religious leaders to lobby for their own inclusion in the process. Unlike in the formalised processes of legal consultation on the policy level of cooperation, at the symbolic level of cooperation not all religious organizations participate on an equal par. The need to lobby for inclusion in turn contributes to a personalization of the cooperation. The ability to participate in informal

negotiations is often dependent on the contacts of individual religious leaders with policy makers (Interviews 1, 3 and 4).

At the same time, much of the coordinated cooperation between the government and the religious organizations that emerges out of the interest of the Austrian state in negotiating social tensions through dialogue and mediation is not even aimed at the individual religious communities, but only at a better dialogue with the Muslims. The initiatives are driven largely by a concern with Islam as a potential problem, rather than by an interest in religious ideas and values in general. The other religious organizations often end up being drawn into the process as a side-effect of the principle of equal treatment that lies at the heart of the 'Austrian way' of governing religious diversity.

Thus, when it comes to issues related to immigration, not all recognised religious organizations are involved in the consultation processes on the same footing. Whereas the Christian majority religions and their NGOs such as *Caritas* and *Diakonie* are consulted as experts in questions of integration of immigrants and the management of asylum seekers, the Muslims and to a lesser extent also the Orthodox are involved as interlocutors for the communities which are the target of the policies being negotiated. Hence, our comparison has brought to the fore that despite the main reason for the increased cooperation being the resolution of tensions with the Muslim community in Europe, the other religious groups also profit from the circumstances because their political role and their public visibility get strengthened.

In sum, this paper has argued that the predominance of symbolic cooperation is increasingly transforming minority religious organizations into representatives of immigrants. As our findings demonstrate, religious organizations are involved in negotiations over integration policies and other migration-related issues that are largely detached from any religious connotation. More than that, in these instances the state invites representatives of

minority religions such as Islam and Orthodoxy to speak as representatives of the immigrant community. In doing so, the state addresses the whole immigrant population as primarily religious persons. This attitude homogenises the immigrant community, which is taken to be composed only of religious persons. Moreover, it is essentialist, since it reduces the identity of immigrants to a religious identity, which is believed to be relevant even in issues that are largely independent from belief. Whereas religion should indeed be an aspect of integration policy, it cannot be taken to be the main aspect.



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## **ENDNOTES:**

(1) The Austrian census did not compile data on the demographic development of Orthodox Christians in Austria before 2001.

(2) The Austrian state currently recognizes thirteen religious bodies as religious communities: the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Church (Lutheran and Presbyterian), the Islamic Community, the Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian), the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Jewish Community, the Old Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the New Apostolic Church, the Methodist Church of Austria, and the Buddhist Community.

(3) These five are: the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, and the Jewish Community.

(4) There is no reliable data on the number of people belonging to different confessions of Islam, but scholars estimate that between 70 and 90 per cent of Muslims living in Austria are Sunni, between 3 and 15 per cent are Shia, and about 10 per cent are Alevis (Beig 2006; Potz 2008).

(5) ZI 20.251/3-III/3/2004

(6) The so-called ‘integration study’ sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Interior was highly controversial, since the Minister (Liese Prokop) argued on the basis of this report that about half of all Muslims in Austria were ‘unwilling to integrate’ because they were ‘traditional and conservative’ in their attitudes and in their adherence to Islam, and therefore did not share the values of the host society (Rohe 2006).

(7) See article entitled ‘SPÖ, ÖVP und BZÖ buhlen um Ausländerstimmen!’

<http://www.fpoe-graz.at/> (last visited: 19.03.2008)

(8) In Austria these organizations exist especially among the Muslim community. They have for the most part been founded by Turkish immigrants and have a strong focus on cultural and integration issues. These organizations often do not recognise the representativeness of the officially recognised religious organizations and stand in open competition to them.

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Interview 2 (30.01.2008): Michael Staikos, Metropolitan of the Greek Orthodox Church in Vienna.

Interview 3 (25.02.2008): Emmanuel Aydin, Archpriest of the Syrian-Orthodox Church in Vienna.

Interview 4 (18.02.2008): Omar Al-Rawi, Speaker for integration affairs of the Austrian Islamic Faith Community (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich*) and member of the Assembly of the City of Vienna.

Interview 5 (11.06.2008): Drago Vujic, Serbian-Orthodox Parish Priest in Vienna (second district) and secretary of the Serbian-Orthodox Bishop of Germany and Austria.

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