FROM ‘THE OTHER’ TO ‘PART OF US’

A legal, historical, political and sociological analysis of the relationship between Austria and the Islam.

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Abstract:

The general purpose of this thesis is to analyse the attitude towards and the relationship with Islam in Austria, a country actually among the most liberal and active ones in Europe. Due to demographic changes, the Muslim population of Austria increased substantially during the last decades. Anti-Muslim attitudes, direct and indirect discrimination and the rise of right-wing parties and nationalism are opposed to this demographic development. Muslim and Islam are still perceived as something not belonging to ‘us’ and both the media and political parties are misusing corresponding images.

This thesis will try to throw light on the real situation through an in-depth analysis of the legal, historical, political and sociological aspects that influence the relationship between the Austrian state and Islam. Starting with an analysis of the 2015 Islam Act, it will continue by explaining the Austrian approach to secularism (through recognising religious groups) and examine the creation of Austrian national identity, showing that religion has played a minor role in this process. In order to understand the othering discourse regarding Muslims, theories of cultural and collective memory will be used.

Finally, the thesis shows how – on a historical and sociological level- Islam has in fact been/become part of Austria. Nevertheless, the situation remains tense due to national and international developments. For this reason, it is crucial to promote integration, collaboration and participation of Muslims in the Austrian society.
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