

## New citizenship tests

# Germany: spying and discrimination against Muslims

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18 January 2006

Muslims living in the southwest state of Baden-Württemberg applying for a German passport now have to submit to unprecedented spying by the state that not only violates the personal rights of the individuals concerned, but also discriminates against all those of Islamic faith. Those suspected of not being “constitutionally loyal” can be interviewed and screened by government representatives—an act that openly contravenes rights of citizens under the German constitution.

Prospective citizens have to demonstrate their knowledge of the constitution and the “free democratic basic order” of Germany in order to qualify for a German passport. For the Interior Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, a person’s commitment to citizenship also includes their “internal attitude.” As of the start of this year, numerous interviews have been held with people from Islamic countries, or who are believed to hold Islamic beliefs, with the aim of uncovering the views of these passport applicants.

The basis for these interviews is a departmental handbook that encompasses 30 different points, each one containing one or more questions. The handbook is intended to resolve any doubts—or confirm them—that the immigration department has about “whether the applicant has really understood the content of his declaration [commitment to the constitution] and whether his declaration really expresses the applicant’s convictions.”

The content of the handbook represents an illegitimate intrusion by the state into the personal and political affairs of individuals. Its catalogue of questions reflects the racism of the German state, casting blanket suspicion on all Muslims for oppressing female family members, exercising self-justice and sympathising with terrorist acts. The brazen and provocative form of the questions reveals that this new procedure for assessing people for citizenship serves more to debase and intimidate migrants than to in any way defend the basic principles of the constitution.

The Interior Ministry bluntly asks Muslims whether they

are supporters of Al Qaeda: “You have heard about the attacks on 11 September 2001 in New York and 11 March 2004 in Madrid. In your eyes, were the perpetrators terrorists or freedom fighters? Explain your opinion.” According to the immigration department in Baden-Württemberg, having Islamic beliefs is sufficient reason to assume that you have contact with terrorists: “You find out from people in your neighbourhood or from your circle of friends or acquaintances that a terrorist attack has been committed or is being planned. How do you react? What do you do?”

The handbook contains other questions that have nothing to do with a supposed assessment of a person’s “internal attitude to the constitution”: “In Germany you can decide whether to visit a male or female doctor. In certain cases, though, this is not possible: emergencies, shift changes at the hospital. In such cases, would you rather be treated or operated on by a female doctor (male applicants) or a male doctor (female applicants)?”

The intention behind other questions is incomprehensible: “What do you think about the following statement: ‘Democracy is the worst form of government we have, but the best one which exists.’” Other questions completely contradict the social reality of the country, a reality that migrants in particular experience on a daily basis: “Anyone in Germany can, with the relevant qualifications, obtain entry into his/her desired occupation. What do you think about this?” Other questions openly amount to political snooping and intimidation: “In Germany, parties and organisations can be prohibited due to activities that contravene the constitution. Would you continue to support such a party or organisation when it is prohibited? Under which circumstances?”

Most of the questions are related to sex and family relationships. On these issues, the immigration department takes an interest in the clothing of daughters and their participation in swimming classes, as well as the applicant’s opinion on violence in marital relationships. The latter topic

offers broad opportunities for provocation: “Your daughter/sister comes home and tells you that she was sexually assaulted. What do you do as father/mother/brother/sister?” Homophobia can also be used as a reason to refuse German citizenship to Muslims: “Imagine that your adult son comes to you and explains that he is homosexual and wants to live with another man. How do you react?”

Many commentators have already pointed out that, according to these criteria, one would have to take citizenship away from many Germans—above all, from the German Pope. How many parents don’t allow their daughters to wear midriff-baring tops, how many women are dominated by men in relationships, how many people in Germany regard homosexuality as perverse? Without defending in any way any form of backwardness, these questions are sufficient to demonstrate that such criteria are completely inadequate as a basis for refusing someone the right to citizenship.

Just as repellent is the hypocrisy displayed by the immigration department, which seeks to demonstrate its tolerance in contrast to the implied backwardness of the Muslim population. After all, the German state is heavily influenced by the Christian churches, which play a far-reaching role in this country, spreading and cementing reactionary positions in relation to homosexuality and the role of women in society.

The interview ends by requesting applicants to sign a statement that threatens them with loss of citizenship should they fail to act according to the results of their attitude test. The prospective German citizen has to sign “that untruthful statements will be regarded as deception of the immigration department and—even after years—can lead to the revocation of citizenship, even if this means that as a result I become stateless.”

Such a penalty is absurd in light of the questions. What will this mean? Will new German Muslim citizens have to hand in their passports if they do not allow themselves to be treated by a doctor? This passage by the Baden-Württemberg immigration department, which poses as a defender of the German constitution, in fact contravenes the constitution (not to mention international law), which prohibits the revocation of citizenship under any circumstances if it means that the person affected were to become stateless as a result.

That the guidelines of the Interior Ministry are saturated with the racism of an authoritarian state, and in reality have nothing to do with the defence of the constitution, is also shown by what is not asked in the interview to determine the applicant’s loyalty to the constitution.

Applicants are not asked if they understand that under the

constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany the dignity of a person is inviolable and that human rights are deemed sacred. The government departments do not ascertain whether the future German is familiar with Article 3 of the constitution, which states that no one may be discriminated against or favoured due to their ancestry, race, language, place of origin, or their religious or political beliefs. Nor are the officials interested in whether passport applicants are aware of the constitutional rights to freedom of opinion, association and organisation, or whether they have understood that, according to the constitution, asylum is guaranteed to victims of political victimisation and that property should serve the benefit of society as a whole.

In other words, applicants are not informed of their rights, incorporated into the German constitution after the Second World War as a direct result of the experiences of the Nazi dictatorship. Rather, Muslim applicants have to go through an interview and tolerate blanket accusations made against them, that they may not have the ability to be integrated into German society or are potential criminals, and be threatened with the harshest of penalties.

These new procedures to assess Muslims as prospective citizens in Baden-Württemberg, under the cover of “defence of democracy,” is an attempt to introduce methods of spying and intimidation that contravene every democratic principle. No one should underestimate the dangers posed because these new practices are at first aimed “only” against Muslims. Such police-state methods are often tested out against the weakest sections of society before they are applied to the entire population.

Baden-Württemberg Justice Minister Ulrich Goll (Free Democratic Party) has already used criticism of the new measures to demand an expansion of spying operations. He was quoted by the media as saying that in order to prevent allegations being made against the state for discrimination, such questions “should be applied equally to all, and not just confined to Muslims.”



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