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In Germany, High Court overturns headscarf ban for teachers

Huffington Post (13.03.2015) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/13/germany-headscarf-ban_n_6863336.html - Germany's highest court on Friday struck down a state law banning teachers from wearing headscarves as unconstitutional, saying it violates the right to religious freedom.

The Federal Constitutional Court's ruling came in the case of two female Muslim teachers from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, but will also apply to the several other German states that have headscarf bans. It came after more than 12 years of legal battles, and the issue already made it to the high court in Karlsruhe in 2003, when judges ruled that headscarves were allowed unless banned by specific laws.

That prompted several states to pass those laws.

"A blanket ban on religious expression in public schools based upon the outward appearance of educators is not compatible with their religious freedoms," the court said in a statement.

The North Rhine-Westphalia state law banned headscarves on grounds they could call into question a teacher's neutrality and cause classroom disruptions. But the court ruled a school would need to show "not only an abstract but a sufficiently specific risk" to justify a ban.

The court also said a clause excepting "Christian and Western educational and cultural values or traditions" from the state's ban violated the constitution's protection against discrimination on religious grounds.

Following the ruling, the state said it would re-examine its law and make the necessary changes.

Germany court ends ban on Islamic headscarves for teachers

BBC News (13.03.2015) - Germany's highest court has struck down a ban on headscarves for state school teachers as unconstitutional.

The court ruled that a 2004 ban violated religious freedom.

The case was brought by two female Muslim teachers who had previously been forced to wear alternative head dress.

The ban was imposed on the grounds that headscarves could lead to disruption in classrooms and prompt questions about a teacher's neutrality. Christian symbols were exempt from the ban.

On Friday, the court ruled that schools will now need to show "not only an abstract but a sufficiently specific risk" to justify a ban on the earlier grounds.

It also decided that a clause exempting "Christian and Western educational and cultural values or traditions" from the ban was discriminatory.

In a statement, the Federal Constitutional Court said a "blanket ban on religious expression... based on the outward appearance of educators" was incompatible with religious freedoms.

The teachers originally brought the case against a local law in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Other states across the country also ban teachers from wearing headscarves, but this ruling strikes out those laws as well.

Anti-Islam rally draws big crowd in German city of Dresden

The Huffington Post (12.01.2015) - A weekly anti-Islam rally in the eastern German city of Dresden drew its biggest crowd yet on Monday, after organizers declared it a tribute to the victims of the terror attacks in Paris.

Organizers said 40,000 people participated in the march, while Dresden police put the figure at over 25,000 people — still considerably more than the 18,000 who came last week.

The group, which calls itself Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West, or PEGIDA, had asked supporters to wear black ribbons as a show of respect for the 17 people killed in the French capital last week.

"The terrible acts of Paris are further proof that PEGIDA is needed," said Lutz Bachmann, one of the organizers of the Dresden rally.

PEGIDA's critics, including all of Germany's mainstream parties, have accused the group of exploiting the attack to stir up race hatred.

Some marchers held up placards with the names of the French journalists killed by Islamic militants in Paris. Others carried banners condemning the "lying press" that they claimed misrepresents their cause. One poster showed Chancellor Angela Merkel wearing an Islamic headscarf.

One marcher, Markus Bauer of Bautzen, said he had come to express his disgust about what he called the "ruling class."

"Wall Street controls them all. They are responsible for all the wars and people know that," he said.

PEGIDA's organizers insist that they aren't aligned with Germany's far right, but many in the crowd sported insignia and clothing that neo-Nazis use to identify each other.

In other cities across Germany, counter protesters outnumbered the anti-Islam demonstrators.

Berlin police said 4,000 people demonstrated against an anti-Islam rally numbering about 400 protesters. In Munich 20,000 people took to the streets to support tolerance and only 1,500 anti-Islam protesters showed up.

Leipzig police estimated that 15,000 counter protesters had rallied against a far smaller number of anti-Islam demonstrators.

Controversy surrounding "Twelve Tribes" – Sociologist warns against targeted misinformation by sect experts

FOREF Reports Exclusively

FOREF (01.01.2015) - A good 20 years ago, a branch of the religious community "Twelve Tribes" was established in Germany. In August 2013, the community was prohibited from running a school of their own since they discipline their children corporally – although in a soft manner, as the community emphasizes. One month after that, in a controversial large-scale operation the police went and got 41 children out of the communities in Nördlingen-Klosterzimmern and Wörnitz. At this point after more than a year, 20 children are still in the custody of the *Jugendamt* (Youth Welfare Office).

Susan J. Palmer, sociologist of religion, points out that after the police raids in September 2013, the doctors did not find any evidence of abuse. She criticizes the blind trust the German authorities put in the self-proclaimed sect experts who are running a targeted disinformation and demagoguery campaign against the community.

Note in Advance: FOREF distances itself from the use of physical chastisement, even if moderate, and rejects the disproportionately harsh intervention of the authorities in this case as well, which have long term traumatizing consequences for the children. Cf. Art. 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect against the use of force, abuse, and neglect (see below).

In late October 2014, the District Court of Ansbach decided upon a petition of the *Jugendamt* (Youth Welfare Office) to permanently withdraw custody from three sets of parents. The decisions are not final yet. The affected parents of six children aged 1-6 years have already filed complaints. Also at the District Court of Nördlingen, 12 more custody proceedings are currently pending, the court director Helmut Beyschlag told the news magazine [Spiegel](#). There is no end in sight to the conflict between the German authorities and the Twelve Tribes.

As early as 1984 in the USA, the "Twelve Tribes" were accused of abusing their children whereupon 112 children were taken into state custody in a first police campaign. That same day Judge Frank Mahady strongly condemned this measure as grossly unconstitutional, whereupon the children were allowed to go home that same day. Since

the allegations did not solidify even after further investigations, the charge was dropped after a short while.

Police raid at the religious community "Twelve Tribes" in Nördlingen, Bavaria.

History now repeats in Germany, although with the following difference: Next to individuals like "career" apostate Robert Pleyer, Focus reporter Axel Wolfsgruber, or RTL reporter Wolfram Kuhnigk who personally benefit from the media attention, it is mainly the controversial anti-cult organization [FECRIS](#) that is behind the demagoguery campaign targeted against the religious community and works through "sect experts" (such as [Sabine Riede](#) or [Wolfgang Behnk](#)) to stigmatize religious minority communities. By nurturing public fear of "sectarian deviations" ("[dérives sectaires](#)" in the original FECRIS slang), the anti-cult lobby legitimizes its own existence as a "pool of experts" and [receives public funds](#) for their "informative and advisory activity."

Chronology of a Scandal: Police Raids in Nördlingen and Wörnitz - 41 Children Hauled off, Search Warrant was "Faxed in Later"

On September 5th, 2013, in the early dawn, around 30 police emergency vehicles pulled into Klosterzimmern, the property of the "Twelve Tribes" in Nördlingen, Bavaria. Since on that day the community was keeping a holiday, the morning gathering, which usually would be at 6 o'clock, took place later and most community members were still sleeping. A 23-year-old brother in faith who was milking the cows shortly after 6 o'clock, was the first one to see the massive presence of police. He asked the officers what was going on and asked for a search warrant. Rather than showing it to him, they threatened to arrest him if he "continued to resist." The police surrounded the entire property only to storm the celebration hall where they were suspecting the morning gathering. Instead they found an empty hall.

More at

<http://foref-europe.org/2015/01/01/germany-controversy-surrounding-twelve-tribes-sociologist-warns-against-targeted-misinformation-by-sect-experts/>
