

Press Release

“European Muslims perceive the EU more positively than other Europeans”

For the first time, the Cluster of Excellence analyses the attitudes of European Muslims towards the EU – Far less sceptical than other groups such as Christians and those without religious affiliation – Reason probably lies with their relatively higher life satisfaction in their host country – Religiosity does not seem to influence the attitudes of Muslims towards the EU – Experiencing discrimination however threatens positive attitudes

Münster, 27 October 2017 (exc) According to a study of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”, Muslims in Europe have a more positive view of the European Union (EU) compared to all other groups of the European population. “On average, Muslims have a higher level of trust in EU institutions than members of other religious or non-religious groups such as Christians and those unaffiliated with any religion,” says Prof. Dr. Bernd Schlipphak, political scientist at the Cluster of Excellence. “Of all the groups analysed from 16 European countries, Muslims are the only ones who, for example, rate their trust in the European Parliament higher than 5, on a scale from 1 to 10. Currently, there is a lot of discussion about the lack of acceptance of the EU among many sections of the population – yet the majority of the Muslim immigrants from the first and second generation do not belong to this group of critics.” At the same time, the results are in contrast to EU attitudes of Muslims in Arab countries: “We were able to demonstrate in earlier studies that only a minority of the Arab population has a positive opinion of the EU.”

According to the new study, one of the most important reasons for the favourable attitudes of the majority of European Muslims is that they are more satisfied with their living situation in the EU than other groups: “Approximately 95 per cent of the Muslims interviewed are first or second generation migrants who compare their new living situation with that in their country of origin: they have a higher appreciation for their economic situation, provision of healthcare and the political system in the host country than those who did not immigrate”, explains Prof. Schlipphak. “This satisfaction leads to a higher level of trust in domestic institutions such as the parliament of the host country which, in return, is transferred onto the EU level.” In addition to being satisfied with democracy, economy and health, a higher political interest has a positive effect on trust in EU institutions, according to the study. “Religiosity, in contrast, does not have an influence on attitudes towards the EU, contrary to what we assumed.”

“Religiosity has no influence on attitudes towards the EU”

“European Muslims do consider themselves to be more religious than other Europeans”, explains political scientist Mujtaba Isani, co-author of the study. “This religiosity, however, has neither a negative nor a positive influence on their trust in political institutions on the domestic and the EU level.” With this study, the researchers also provide a link to the debate that discusses whether the incompatibility of European and Islamic values and religiosity impedes integration. Like religiosity, neither education nor age nor gender have an influence on EU attitudes, as Prof. Schlipphak remarks. “Our study shows: Successful integration leads to higher levels of trust in political institutions on a domestic and European level. Long-term integration efforts are indispensable if we want to keep up the high level of trust among European Muslims in the EU.”

The study is the first systematic empirical analysis of EU attitudes among European Muslims. The researchers evaluated data from the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2002 until 2014; more recent data on the topic of the study is not available. The academics compared the statements of 3,601 European Muslims with those of other religious and non-religious groups. Among the Muslims interviewed, 95 per cent immigrated into the EU; 71 per cent of these were first generation migrants.

“Second Generation Immigrants More Critical – Strengthen Integration”

According to political scientist Schlipphak, the study reveals social threats for the future: “The more distant the migration experience, the lower are the levels of satisfaction.” Second generation European Muslim immigrants show less trust in the political institutions of the host country and the EU than first generation European Muslim immigrants. Discrimination is demonstrated to have a negative effect on the EU attitudes: “European Muslims, who feel discriminated against, trust the institutions of the European community to a lesser degree. This is all the more problematic since the feeling of being discriminated against is more widespread among second generation European Muslim immigrants, as shown by our analyses.” Against this background, the political science scholar recommends “to strengthen the integration of European Muslims in the long term and take a look at the problems of the second generation in particular, in order to maintain the current positive attitude of the majority.”

Political scientists Bernd Schlipphak and Mujtaba Isani have recently published their research results under the title “In the European Union we trust: European Muslim attitudes toward the European Union” in the renowned peer-reviewed journal “European Union Politics”. Every two years, European citizens are interviewed concerning a wide range of social and political topics for the underlying European Social Survey (ESS). The country analysis includes Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. (dak/vvm)

Note: Isani, Mujtaba/ Schlipphak, Bernd (2017): In the European Union we trust: European Muslim attitudes toward the European Union. European Union Politics. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116517725831>. The article may be downloaded at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1465116517725831>

Caption: Prof. Dr. Bernd Schlipphak (photo: Benedikt Weischer)

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The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of WWU Münster

At the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (WWU), some 200 academics from more than 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and from around 14 countries deal with the complex relationship of religion and politics across epochs and cultures: from the antique world of gods, Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages and early modern times to today's situation in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. It is nationally the largest research association of its kind and of the 43 Clusters of Excellence in Germany, it is the only one to deal with religion. The federal government and the state governments support the project within the scope of the Excellence Initiative with 40.1 million euros from 2012 until 2018