

# Bonner Querschnitte

## Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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### BQ 302 – No. 16/2014

## Supporting the Cause of Religious Freedom in Uzbekistan

### Working Meeting with Minister Yusupov and Sheik Mansur

(Bonn, 26.05.2014) The Islamic scholar Dr. Christine Schirmmacher and the sociologist of religion Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher have endorsed religious freedom in a visit to the Uzbekistan government. In this connection, they conducted a one-hour discussion with the Uzbekistan Minister of Religion and the chairman of the commission for religious issues (official title: Chair of The Committee on Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan), Artukbek Adilovich Yusupov. The discussion took place in the Khan-Imam Complex, the center of Uzbek Islam. Prior thereto, both scholars had visited religious sites throughout the entire country and had met with human rights activists.

Along with additional staff members from the ministry and the religious commission, Sheik Abdulaziz Mansur participated as the representative for the Grand Mufti who is currently in Mecca. He is also the rector of the the Tashkent Islamic Institute



(Toshkent Islom Instituti), where Uzbek imams are trained, and he is the deputy chairman of the spiritual administration of Muslims in Uzbekistan. There are 10 Islamic training facilities and 2,035 mosques in Uzbekistan under his responsibility.

The top representative of the Russian Orthodox Church in Uzbekistan represented Uzbekistan's Christians in the discussion. In addition, Thomas and Christine Schirmmacher were accompanied by Prof. Dr. Marat Zakhidov, the president of the Uzbek Section of the International Society for Human Rights.

Both scholars welcomed the fact that Islamic scholars have long been active in their mosques and in training against Islamism and against the thought of Islamic state. They likewise welcomed the fact that the Uzbek government has been defending itself against radical influences from a number of neighboring states and has ensured that old Koran manuscripts being preserved do not become a mecca for Islamists. However, they also reminded the government that religious freedom not only applies

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to the Russian Orthodox church but also has to apply to all other denominations, to all small Christian churches, and to all other religious minorities. They pointed to recent studies maintaining that religious freedom brings about a more peaceful society, while its oppression usually triggers violence and often generates movements that demonstrate a willingness to resort to violence or are even of a terrorist nature.



The German Embassy supported the discussion by sending an interpreter who translated from German into Uzbek and Russian as well as into German from Uzbek and Russian. Additionally, the German photographer Katja Kreder produced a series of images during the discussions.

The committee for religious issues is officially responsible for religious freedom in the country. That also actually includes control and limitations on religious communities, which applies to Islamic groups deviating from state Islam as well as small Christian churches. The country is proud of having banished radical Islam, above all the Islamist movement IMU, from officially recognized theology.

Shei Mansur later led Christine Schirmmacher through the archive not open to the public in the Khan-Imam Complex, which contains thousands of unpublished ancient manuscripts.

In the same complex, both scholars also surveyed the supposedly oldest manuscript of the Koran, which contains about one-third of the text of the Koran. This version of the Koran was originally kept in Samarkand. Via a number of aberrant paths it



made its way to Taschkent through confiscation by the Soviet Union in 1941, and after Uzbekistan achieved independence it was delivered by the government to the Grand Mufti of Uzbekistan. Traditionally, it is said that this version of the Koran stems from Kalif Uthman in the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. However, the calligraphy and radiocarbon dating speak more for the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Quite a few Muslim researchers also cite this dating ([www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Mss/samarqand.html](http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Mss/samarqand.html)).

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With that said, it would still be one of the two or three oldest manuscripts of the Koran, although it would not stem directly from the time of Kalif Uthman.

## Downloads and Links:

- On dating the manuscript of the Koran: E. A. Rezvan, "On The Dating Of An 'Uthmanic Qur'an' From St. Petersburg," *Manuscripta Orientalia*, 2000, Volume 6, No. 3, pp. 19-22.
- For a download of this copy of the Koran: [www.alrahman.de/beitrag/taschkent-koran-manuskripte](http://www.alrahman.de/beitrag/taschkent-koran-manuskripte)
- [Photo 1](#) © Katja Kreder
- [Photo 2](#) © Katja Kreder
- [Photo 3](#) © Katja Kreder
- [Photo 4](#): Seat of the Ministry of Religion in Tashkent. © Katja Kreder
- [Photo 5](#): from the left: Sheik Mansur, Thomas Schirmacher, Marad Zakhidov. © Katja Kreder

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