

The Cologne Central Mosque (German: DITIB-Zentralmoschee Köln, Turkish: Köln Merkez-Camii) is a building commissioned by German Muslims of the Organization DITIB for a large, representative Zentralmoschee (central mosque)[1] in Cologne, Germany. This mosque was inaugurated by Turkish President Erdogan. After controversy, the project won the approval of Cologne's city council.[2]

The mosque is designed in neo-Ottoman architectural style, with glass walls, two minarets and a dome. The mosque is proposed to have a bazaar as well as other secular areas intended for interfaith interactions. As the mosque will be one of Europe's biggest mosques, and the largest mosque in Germany,[3] it has been criticized by some, particularly for the height of the minarets.[4]

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Design[edit]

The 48,000-square-foot (4,500 m<sup>2</sup>) mosque cost £15–20 million to build,[5] aiming to house 2,000 to 4,000 worshippers.[6][7] The mosque is funded by Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği (DITIB), a branch of the Turkish government's religious affairs authority,[8] bank loans, and donations from 884 Muslim associations.[7] Cologne's St. Theodore Catholic Church has also decided to fundraise for the mosque.[9] The architects of the mosque are Gottfried Böhm and his son Paul Böhm,[10] who specializes in building churches.[11] The mosque is in the Ottoman architecture style. It has a concrete and glass dome, and two 55 meter high minarets.[8] The mosque has the bazaar and entrance on the ground floor, lecture halls in the basement, the prayer area on the upper floor and include a Muslim library.[6] A well is placed in the centre to connect the two levels and create a pleasant atmosphere. The mosque consists of flat-like wall screens which form a dome in the centre.[1]

It also has glass walls, which according to DITIB spokesman Alboga give visitors a feeling of openness.[12] According to the architect, openness is further enhanced by an inviting staircase from the street.[11] The developers have required that the secular areas of the mosque (e.g. the restaurant, event halls and stores) be open to people of all religions.[11] A plan welcomed by then mayor of Cologne Fritz Schramma to build shorter minarets was dropped after the architects said the plan would leave the minarets out of proportion with the rest of the building and surrounding structures.[4]

Opening[edit]

The inauguration of the mosque was controversial as the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs neglected to invite mayor of Cologne Henriette Reker to the event. The failure to invite officials of Cologne municipality was interpreted as the mosque representing a growing Turkish parallel society in Germany and lacking respect for German institutions. President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attended and held a speech at the

event.[13][14]

Controversy[edit]

The project has been opposed by author Ralph Giordano,[5] right-wingers, Jörg Uckermann [de], then local district's deputy mayor, has criticized the project saying that "We don't want to build a Turkish ghetto in Ehrenfeld. I know about Londonistan and I don't want that here." [5]

Markus Wiener of the far-right activist group Pro Cologne,[15] expressed his fear that the Cologne mosque will empower the Muslim population too much.[16]

On June 16, 2007, 200 people gathered in a protest organized by Pro Cologne against the mosque including representatives from the Austrian Freedom Party and the Belgian Vlaams Belang.[6][17] Then district deputy mayor Uckermann seconded that he thinks many residents reject the mosque because they believe that Cologne is a "Christian city".[18]

Author Ralph Giordano stated that he opposed the project as the mosque would be "an expression of the creeping Islamization of our land", a "declaration of war", [16] and that he wouldn't want to see women wearing headscarfs on German streets, likening their appearance to "human penguins". Henryk M. Broder, a journalist, disagrees with Giordano's metaphor but said that "A mosque is more than a church or a synagogue. It is a political statement." [17] Giordano's remarks have turned the local dispute into a national debate about the place of Islam in Germany.[17] and other prominent Germans criticized the project as well. District mayor Uckermann stated that Giordano's comments "broke down the wall. Before if you criticised this monstrous mosque you were a Nazi. But we have a problem with the integration of Muslims. It's a question of language and culture." [5]

Uckermann left the conservative CDU for right-wing Pro Cologne in 2008 after being voted out of office as the district's deputy mayor and reportedly facing party exclusion.[19]

The city's official for integration Marlis Bredehorst stated that "it is important that the Muslims here get dignified houses of prayer" and added that "two hundred years ago, the Protestants had to pray secretly in Catholic Cologne [...] that is something we can't imagine anymore today." [6] The city's mayor, Fritz Schramma, who supports the project said that "For me, it is self-evident that the Muslims need to have a prestigious place of worship, but it bothers me when people have lived here for 35 years and they don't speak a single word of German." [17] Christian leaders have taken similarly ambivalent stances: the Catholic Church has long supported the project, though recently Cardinal Joachim Meisner, Archbishop of Cologne, has been more cautious: when asked if he was afraid of the mosque, he said, "I don't want to say I'm afraid, but I have an uneasy feeling." [12] He also stated that Turkey should allow its Christian minorities equivalent rights. He said the mosque would change the skyline of Cologne.[8] Wolfgang Huber, Germany's top Protestant bishop, criticized the "male domination" he saw in Islam and said Muslims should be able to convert to Christianity without fearing reprisals [8] and the penalty of death.

Public opinion seems "guardedly supportive, with a majority of residents saying they favor it". [12] A poll taken by a local newspaper among 500 Cologne residents showed that the project is supported by 63%, of whom 27% want its size to be reduced. [17][20]

A protest planned by Pro Cologne for September 20, 2008 was canceled by police at the last minute in the interest of public safety, after clashes between police and protestors. [21][22]

On August 28, 2008, the Cologne City Council voted to approve the construction of the mosque. this position was taken by all parties except the Christian democrats (CDU). Outside the hall, a group of 30 protesters demonstrated against the approval, while 100 demonstrated in favor of it.[2]

The Cologne mosque project has been contrasted with a less controversial project in Duisburg, Germany: in Duisburg, there was co-operation and good communication from an early stage between German politicians, church and community leaders and the developers of the mosque.[16][23]

See also[edit]

Islam portal

Controversies related to Islam and Muslims

List of mosques in Germany