

*Democracy, Diversity and Civic Inequality:
Culture and Religion in the Netherlands, Germany and Beyond*
June 22, 2009 13:30-21:00 in Berlin

Opening remarks

by **Dr. Andreas Poltermann**, Director, Domestic Division, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation. We are very grateful for the chance that we have had to collaborate with Michal Bodemann at University of Toronto in Berlin and Gert-Joachim Glaeßner from the Berlin Graduate School of Social Sciences. It is through this cooperation, that we are able to present to you, what we hope, will be a very lively discussion centred around the topic of diversity, democracy, and civic inequality.

As you may know, the Heinrich Böll Foundation is committed to equal rights for cultural and ethnic minorities and to the societal and political participation of immigrants. Through our work in Berlin, throughout Germany, and internationally, the Heinrich Böll Foundation promotes the equality of opportunity and respectful dealings between women and men of different ages, religions, ethnic origins and sexual orientations. We work especially to build the institutional and basic law prerequisites that are necessary to reconcile religions with democratic freedom. The tensions between state structures and religions between the democratic and religious values need to be addressed.

In addition, we at the Heinrich Böll Foundation believe that the incorporation of underrepresented groups is an essential part of every nation's democratic culture and to the building of a true and representative democracy.

After the recent European Parliament Elections, the topic of diversity and inequality is ever more important. In the June 6th elections, the conservative parties won the majority of the votes in some of the more wealthy countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and Great Britain. The election of these conservative officials is a reflection of the underlying feelings of society on key policy points, such as issues involving migrants, as well as their roll within society.

With the election of the more conservative parliamentarians, there is no question that the attitudes and the policies of the EU will be changed. The following questions are therefore posed: How will these changes affect migrants? What will they mean for the inclusion of minorities in all areas of society and politics?

Through this conference, I hope that we will be able to answer these questions and that we can have a lively discussion on the theme of multicultural policies and how they will play a roll in the future of the European Union's member states, as well as internationally.

Let me end with warm thanks to my colleagues Dr. Marianne Zepp and Eike Botta who immediately took the opportunity of collaborating with Michal Bodeman and inviting you all to be guests in the

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new headquarter of Heinrich Boell Foundation. I wish you a fruitful conference with lively discussions that practice respect for diversity.