The German Headscarf Debate

Axel Frhr. von Campenhausen

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.byu.edu/lawreview

Part of the Comparative and Foreign Law Commons, Human Rights Law Commons, and the Religion Law Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.byu.edu/lawreview/vol2004/iss2/11

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Brigham Young University Law Review at BYU Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in BYU Law Review by an authorized editor of BYU Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact hunterlawlibrary@byu.edu.
The German Headscarf Debate

*Axel Frhr. von Campenhausen*†

I. INTRODUCTION

Nearly twenty years ago, teachers employed by the state in Germany began to wear the reddish-colored clothing of the Bhagwan (Osho) religious movement in obligatory state schools, thus silently yet highly visibly advertising for their religious community, which at that time was still considered a “youth sect” [Jugendsekte]. Many courts at the time prohibited this activity without much controversy.¹ In contrast, with its Headscarf Decision²

---

* Professor von Campenhausen is a member of the Law Faculty of the University of Göttingen and specializes in public law, church law, church-state law, and foundation law [Stiftungsrecht]. This Article is reproduced in similar form in German in MATERIALDIENST DES KONFESSIONSKUNDLICHEN INSTITUTS IN BENSHEIM (Spring, 2004).

† Translated from German by John B. Fowles, B.A., Brigham Young University; M.St., University of Oxford; J.D., Reuben Clark Law School, Brigham Young University.

The following list of abbreviations provides the uniform abbreviation and the English approximation for each German legal periodical and other select sources cited in this Article.

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>English Approximation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BVerfGE</td>
<td>Decisions of the Federal Constitutional Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVerwGE</td>
<td>Decisions of the Federal Administrative Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVBl.</td>
<td>DEUTSCHES VERWALTUNGSBLATT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPD</td>
<td>EVANGELISCHER PRESSEDIENST DOKUMENTATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EssGespr.</td>
<td>ESSENER GESPRÄCHE ZUM THEMA STAAT UND KIRCHE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GG</td>
<td>GRUNDGESETZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JZ</td>
<td>JURISTENZEITUNG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kur</td>
<td>KIRCHE UND RECHT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJW</td>
<td>NEUE JURISTISCHE WOCHENSCHRIFT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVwZ</td>
<td>NEUE ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR VERWALTUNGSRECHT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBlBW</td>
<td>VERWALTUNGSBLÄTTER FÜR BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1. In contrast, with its Headscarf Decision²

---

² Translated from German by John B. Fowles, B.A., Brigham Young University; M.St., University of Oxford; J.D., Reuben Clark Law School, Brigham Young University.
of September 24, 2003, the German Federal Constitutional Court has unleashed an avalanche of controversy; that is, the court has needlessly raised a difficult political dispute. Specifically, although the court ruled that a prohibition on a Muslim teacher from wearing a headscarf—which has previously been held valid—is indeed theoretically permissible, the court nevertheless declared the specific legal regulation at issue insufficient and therefore mandated elected legislatures to create a “sufficiently clear legal basis” on which to justify such a limitation of religious freedom, yet provided them with no guidance in doing so.

In Germany—a country largely unshaken by religious conflicts and where every individual enjoys full religious freedom under an overall satisfactorily functioning rule of law—the court has spoken in terms of religious freedom in the debate about the headscarf of a Muslim school teacher. In holding the administrative regulation


3. Bundesverwaltungsgericht [BVerwG] [Federal Administrative Court], NJW 55 (2002), 3844 (upholding the administrative prohibition on teachers wearing a headscarf in public state schools), Verwaltungsgerichtshof Baden-Württemberg [VGH Baden-Württemberg] [Baden-Württemberg Court of Administrative Appeals], NJW 54 (2001), 2899 (upholding the administrative decision prohibiting teachers from wearing a headscarf while teaching).


5. Id.

6. The headscarf problem can surface anywhere. For information concerning this issue in employment in the civil service (e.g., a school teacher), compare the situation in Germany, Oberverwaltungsgericht Lüneburg [VG Lüneburg] [Lüneburg High Administrative Court], ZEvKr 48 (2003), 219, and the decision below, Verwaltungsgericht Lüneburg [VG Lüneburg] [Lüneburg Administrative Trial Court], NJW 54 (2001), 767, with the situation in Switzerland, Dahlab v. Switzerland, 2001-V Eur. Ct. H.R. 447, reported in German
prohibiting a Muslim school teacher, as a civil servant, from wearing a headscarf while teaching insufficient, the court nullified all related regulations immediately, with no transitional period.7 Now, laws in each of Germany’s sixteen federal states [Bundesländer or Länder] must be amended if a particular state’s law does not declare directly that the state [Bundesland or Land] prefers not to legislate on whether a Muslim teacher may or may not wear a headscarf while teaching, as in the case of the Land Northrhine-Westphalia.8 In response to the Headscarf Decision, the Länder Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, and Lower Saxony have already submitted or announced draft laws to provide a legal basis for prohibiting teachers from wearing headscarves while teaching.

Prominent public figures—not jurists but experienced politicians who are also authorities on religion—have entered the constitutional fray, speaking against a prohibition on headscarves. For example, Hans Maier, the former Bavarian Minister of Education [Kultusminister], has supported the integration of Muslims in society through upbringing and education since the 1970s.9 In this effort, he has strived to promote dialogue in schools and colleges.
between the “Children of Abraham” who, despite their common roots, are all so different from each other. That is why he could “only be horrified at this blind zeal” behind the drive for a renewed prohibition following the Headscarf Decision. Maier is against a renewed prohibition on headscarves because he fears the undesired consequences it would have for all religious symbols. According to Maier, nothing is as important as equality in a secular state. Especially the younger generation of judges has learned this lesson, asserts Maier. Furthermore, much like the Federal Constitutional Court, Maier also pointed to the variety of interpretations of the headscarf:

[T]he headscarf does not have one single interpretation; rather, it can mean many things (as it did until recently for our own mothers, grandmothers, and aunts!): it can be an expression of tradition, heritage, religious affiliation but also a sign of sexual unavailability, a freely chosen way . . . to lead a self-determined life without breaking with cultural heritage.

Johannes Rau, the Federal President of Germany, has expressed a similar conclusion on the Headscarf Decision in public. First, the Federal President demanded in news interviews that the Islamic headscarf and a Christian amulet be treated equally as the Länder work out their new legislative schemes for prohibiting the headscarf following the Headscarf Decision. Then, using a celebration in

10. Id.
12. Maier, supra note 9, at 26.
13. Id.
14. Id.
16. Maier, supra note 9, at 26 (“Das Kopftuch ist nämlich nicht eindeutig, es kann für vieles stehen (wie es auch bei unseren Müttern, Großmüttern und Tanten vor kurzem noch für vieles stand!): Es kann ein Ausdruck für Tradition, Herkunft, religiöse Bindung sein aber auch ein Zeichen für sexuelle Nichtverfügbarkeit, ein frei gewähltes Mittel . . . , um ohne Bruch mit der Herkunftskultur ein selbstbestimmtes Leben zu führen.”) (omission in original).
Wolfenbüttel of the 275th birthday of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing—
as an occasion to reiterate his original demand, President Rau took
the surprising approach of explaining that religious freedom is
guaranteed to all Germans—a proposition that does not seem to
have been called into question. As had Maier, President Rau made

18. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81)—a thinker, author, and aesthete of the
German Enlightenment—explored the brotherhood of man and the possible harmony of the
three great religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in his last play, Nathan der Weise
[Nathan the Wise] (1779), a “dramatic poem” expressing Lessing’s own “enlightened
humanitarianism,” F.J. Lampert, German Classical Drama 64 (1990), and his concern
with “the essential unity of all true religions and the falsity of religious bigotry,” id. at 69.
Writing from Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, the small German principality where he served as court
librarian from 1770 until his death in 1781, Lessing wrote Nathan the Wise as a rejection of
“literal obedience to the dictates of any religion, be it Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.” Id. at
71. In this work, however, Lessing acknowledges that “an enlightened knowledge of the need
for human brotherhood is not sufficient to bring such brotherhood about.” Benjamin
Bennett, Modern Drama & German Classicism: Renaissance from Lessing to Brecht 82 (1979).

Lessing (Jan. 22, 2004), pt. V, para. 9 [hereinafter Speech in Wolfenbüttel], available at
http://www.bundespraesident.de/top/dokumente/Rede/ix_94041.htm.

20. One of the most well-known aspects of Lessing’s Nathan the Wise is the famous
“Ring Parable” [Ringsparabel], which bears mention here because President Rau was alluding
to its teachings on religious toleration by addressing the headscarf debate in a speech
commemorating Lessing’s 275th birthday. In Nathan the Wise, a Christian Templar, Nathan
the Jew, and the Muslim Sultan Saladin realize their familial relationship to each other. The
“centerpiece” of this development is the Ring Parable. Lampert, supra note 18, at 70.
Attempting to press Nathan the Jew into lending him money, Saladin the Sultan asks Nathan
to tell him which religion is true because “[o]f these three Religions only one can be the true
one.” Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barnhelm, and
Other Plays and Writings act 3, sc. 5, at 230 (Peter Demetz trans. & ed.), in 12 The
German Library (Volkmar Sander ed., 1991). Instead of answering the Sultan’s question
directly, Nathan the Jew wisely relates the Ring Parable:

In days of yore, there dwelt in eastern lands/ A man who had a ring of priceless
worth/ Received from hands beloved. The stone it held:/ An opal, shed a hundred
colors fair:/ And had the magic power that he who wore it,/ Trusting its strength,
was loved of God and men:/ No wonder therefore that this eastern man/ Would
never cease to wear it; and took pains:/ To keep it in his household for all time:/ He
left the ring to that one of his sons/ He loved the best; providing that in turn:/ That
son bequeath to his most favorite son:/ The ring; and thus, regardless of his birth:/
The dearest son, by virtue of the ring:/ Should be the head, the prince of all his
house. . . . / At last this ring, passed on from son to son:/ Descended to a father of
three sons:/ All three of whom were duly dutiful:/ All three of whom in
consequence he needs/ Must love alike. . . . / Then came the time:/ For dying, and
the loving father finds/ Himself embarrassed. . . . / He sends:/ In secret to a jeweler,
of whom:/ He orders two more rings, in pattern like:/ His own, and bids him spare
nor cost nor toil:/ To make them in all points identical./ The jeweler succeeds. . . . /
comments about possible interpretations of the headscarf, concluding that the possible misuse of an object cannot be allowed to inhibit its proper use.\(^{21}\) Above all, he rejected a perceived growing laicism that, in his opinion, resulted from a headscarf prohibition for teachers.\(^{22}\) On Lessing’s grave, President Rau called for toleration\(^{23}\) and at the same time refuted the draft laws prepared in several Bundesländer prohibiting Muslim teachers from wearing the headscarf.\(^{24}\) In President Rau’s view, one cannot forbid one religious symbol and maintain the status quo for everything else: \(^{25}\) “That is not compatible with the religious freedom which our Basic Law guarantees all people and would therefore open the gate to a development that most proponents of a headscarf prohibition do not want.”\(^{26}\) In essence, the prohibition, according to President Rau,

In glee and joy he calls his sons to him,/ Each by himself, confers on him his blessing—/ His ring as well—and dies.

*Id.* act 3, sc. 7, at 231–32. After the death of the father, the three sons dispute among themselves who has the true ring, which makes its possessor beloved of God and men. *Id.* To resolve this conflict, the three brothers appear before a judge whom they ask to determine which brother has the true ring. *Id.* But to the surprise of the three brothers, the judge finds that “O then you are, all three, deceived deceivers,” on the basis that none of the brothers exhibits the type of moral action characteristic of the bearer of the true ring. *Id.* at 234. The judge does not leave it at that, however, and proposes a solution to the problem:

Let each strive/ To match the rest in bringing to the fore/ The magic of the opal in his ring!/ Assist that power with all humility,/ With benefaction, hearty peacefulness,/ And with profound submission to God’s will!/ And when the magic powers of the stones/ Reveal themselves in children’s children’s children:/ I bid you, in a thousand thousand years:/ To stand again before this seat.

*Id.* at 235. This exposition of the Ring Parable reveals President Rau’s misplaced agenda in using his speech honoring Lessing as an opportunity to enter the political fray of the headscarf debate. That is, an appeal to religious toleration on Lessing’s grave meant to reinforce the assertion that religious freedom is guaranteed to all in Germany does not address the real issue: whether a civil servant’s status as a representative of the state subjects the civil servant to demands of state neutrality in matters of religion at the expense of a certain degree of that civil servant’s constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom. See *infra* Parts II.C and III.B for a treatment of the dissent’s correct view in the Headscarf Case that a civil servant who voluntarily enters into this representative relationship with the state needs to be willing, in order to be qualified for the job, to relinquish some degree of religious freedom in the interest of the state’s religious neutrality.

\(^{21}\) *Speech in Wolfenbüttel,* *infra* note 19, pt. VIII, paras. 4–5.

\(^{22}\) *Id.* pt. XI, para. 5.

\(^{23}\) *Id.* pt. VI, para. 9.

\(^{24}\) *Id.* pt. III, para. 1.

\(^{25}\) *Id.* pt. XI, para. 4.

\(^{26}\) *Id.*
would cause an even clearer separation of church and state in Germany.27

A flood of academic treatments28 of the issue that cannot be overlooked suggests that foundational questions must first be debated before the headscarf prohibition can be enacted through

new laws in the *Länder*. Such high academic attention has not been forthcoming since the Crucifix Decision\(^{29}\) of the same court. But the new decision looks like it will be more readily accepted than was the Crucifix Decision.\(^{30}\) This Article examines some of these foundational questions, explaining why the basic reasoning of the majority opinion in the Headscarf Decision was significantly flawed. Part II critically discusses the majority and dissenting opinions in the Headscarf Decision. Part III first analyzes the reasoning of the majority opinion in holding the regulatory prohibition on wearing a headscarf while teaching insufficient, and then concludes that the dissenting opinion was correct in supporting the administrative prohibition. Part IV looks to the French approach to the headscarf problem, distinguishes it from the German situation and philosophy of church-state separation, and recommends distance from the French approach. Finally, Part V concludes that the Federal Constitutional Court failed in its Headscarf Decision to come to a solution for the problem of teachers wearing headscarves in public schools and that the issue will thus surely come before the court again in the near future.

### II. THE HEADSCARF DECISION

#### A. The History of the Headscarf Decision

The Headscarf Decision is the culmination of a six-year legal battle fought by a Muslim school teacher, Fereshta Ludin, for the right to wear her Islamic headscarf while teaching in a public school. Ludin was born in Afghanistan but has lived continuously in Germany since 1987, becoming a German citizen in 1995.\(^{31}\) In 1997, as Ludin neared completion of her pedagogical studies in Stuttgart, the Stuttgart School Supervisory Authority ([SSA] [Oberschulamt Stuttgart]) turned down her application for a position

---

\(^{29}\) Kru zifix-Urteil [Crucifix Decision] (May 16, 1995), BVerfGE 93, 1.


\(^{31}\) Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (284), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 2.
The German Headscarf Debate

as a student teacher.\(^{32}\) The Land Minister of Education, Annette Schavan, a Christian Democrat, intervened on Ludin’s behalf in this instance to allow her to finish her studies.\(^{33}\) Upon completion of her studies in 1998, the Stuttgart SSA denied her application for employment in the state school system because of her “lack of personal qualifications.”\(^{34}\) Specifically, Ludin continued to insist on wearing a headscarf, even while teaching.\(^{35}\) On July 15, 1998, the parliament of Baden-Württemberg, the Land encompassing Stuttgart, expressly decided not to enact a general legislative prohibition on wearing a headscarf while teaching.\(^{36}\) Shortly thereafter, Ludin appealed the administrative denial of her application for employment, thus inaugurating her legal battle with Baden-Württemberg.

Ludin’s case failed at all levels of administrative appeal: she would not be found eligible to teach in the public schools so long as she uncompromisingly refused to remove her headscarf while teaching. On August 14, 1998, Ludin made an internal appeal of the initial administrative denial of her application for employment to the SSA.\(^{37}\) She argued that “wearing a headscarf is not only a characteristic of her personality, but is also an expression of her religious conviction. According to the precepts of Islam, wearing a headscarf is part of her Islamic identity.”\(^{38}\) The SSA rejected this internal appeal on February 4, 1999.\(^{39}\) The SSA first reasoned that paragraph 3 of article 33 of the Basic Law\(^{40}\) indeed prohibited


\(^{33}\) Id.

\(^{34}\) Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (284), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 3 (“mangelnder persönlicher Eignung”).

\(^{35}\) Sequence of Events, supra note 32.

\(^{36}\) Id.

\(^{37}\) Id.

\(^{38}\) Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (284), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 4 (“das Tragen des Kopftuchs sei nicht nur Merkmal ihrer Persönlichkeit, sondern auch Ausdruck ihrer religiösen Überzeugung. Nach den Vorschriften des Islam gehöre das Kopftuchtragen zu ihrer islamischen Identität.”). In the Headscarf Decision, the Federal Constitutional Court conveniently summarized all of the holdings below and serves as a reference to the holdings of the lower courts.

\(^{39}\) Sequence of Events, supra note 32.

\(^{40}\) GRUNDGESETZ [GG] [BASIC LAW] art. 33, para. 3, English translation available at http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/eurodocs/germ/ggeng.html (“Enjoyment of civil and civic rights[,] eligibility for public office, and rights acquired in the public service are independent of
denying an employment application because of religious affiliation alone but then concluded that the same did not exclude the possibility of considering a lack of qualifications for working in the civil service based on an applicant’s religion.\(^{41}\) The SSA then admitted that wearing a headscarf fell within the protections of article 4 of the Basic Law\(^{42}\) but based its denial of her application on the idea that “[t]he religious freedom of the complainant is limited by the fundamental right of the students to negative religious freedom, the parent’s right of upbringing from paragraph 2 of article 6, as well as by the state’s obligation to religious and worldview neutrality.”\(^{43}\)

Ludin appealed this SSA decision to the Stuttgart Administrative Court, which rejected her complaint on March 24, 2000. The Stuttgart Administrative Court held that “[w]earing a headscarf for religious reasons by a teacher constituted a lack of qualification in the sense of section 11, paragraph 1 of the Baden-Württemberg’s Law on State Civil Servants” because of the interplay between the teacher’s religious freedom and the neutrality of the state, on the one hand, and the rights of the students and parents on the other.\(^{44}\)

Next, Ludin appealed this rejection of her complaint to the Baden-Württemberg Court of Administrative Appeals, the Land administrative appellate court, which upheld the Stuttgart Administrative Court’s denial of Ludin’s complaint on June 26, 2001.\(^{45}\) The Court of Administrative Appeals pointed out that an

---

42. Article 4 of the Basic Law provides that
   (1) Freedom of faith and of conscience, and freedom of creed religious or ideological, are inviolable.
   (2) The undisturbed practice of religion is guaranteed.
   (3) No one may be compelled against his conscience to render war service as an armed combatant. Details will be regulated by a Federal law.
43. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (285), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 5 (“Die Religionsfreiheit der Beschwerdeführerin werde durch das Grundrecht auf negative Religionsfreiheit der Schülerinnen und Schüler, das Erziehungsrecht der Eltern aus Art. 6 Abs. 2 GG sowie die Verpflichtung des Staates zu weltanschaulicher und religiöser Neutralität aber eingeschränkt.”).
45. VGH Baden-Württemberg, NJW 54 (2001), 2899.
appellate court has limited powers of review in an administrative
decision about whether an applicant is qualified for a job. Nevertheless, the Court of Administrative Appeals highlighted the
problem of allowing a teacher to wear a headscarf while teaching: “[w]earing a headscarf while teaching could influence the students religiously and could lead to conflicts within the affected
classrooms.” The headscarf constituted a religious symbol “which
the observer [in the school classroom] cannot avoid.” But Ludin
was not satisfied with these justifications of the regulation
prohibiting her from wearing a headscarf while teaching and
appealed this decision of the Land Court of Administrative Appeals
to the Federal Administrative Court in Berlin.

Ludin was no more successful in the Federal Administrative
Court than she had been in the courts below. The Federal
Administrative Court in Berlin rejected Ludin’s complaint,
explaining that “[l]imitations [of an individual’s religious freedom]
arise from the Basic Law itself, particularly from colliding
fundamental rights of those who believe differently.” In fact, the
religious freedom guaranteed by the Basic Law necessitates some
such limitations, especially in the context of public schools in the
name of the state’s mandated religious neutrality. In short,

The right of the teacher to act according to her convictions must
retreat from the competing religious freedom of the students and
parents while teaching. Neither the requirement of toleration nor

46. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (286), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 8
(summarizing the Baden-Württemberg Court of Administrative Appeals’s reasoning).
47. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (287), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 11 (“Das
Tragen des Kopftuchs durch eine Lehrerin im Unterricht könne zu einer religiösen Beeinflussung
der Schüler und zu Konflikten innerhalb der jeweiligen Schulklasse führen . . . .”).
48. Id. (“dem sich der Betrachter nicht entziehen könne”).
49. Bundesverwaltungsgericht [BVerwG] [Federal Administrative Court], NJW 55
(2002), 3344 (upholding the administrative prohibition on teachers wearing a headscarf in
public state schools).
50. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (288), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 13
(“Einschränkungen ergäben sich aus der Verfassung selbst, insbesondere aus kollidierenden
Grundrechten Andersdenkender.”).
51. Id. (“In dem vom Staat organisierten und gestalteten Lebensbereich der
beckenfrieden Pflichtschule komme Art.4 Abs.1 GG freiheitssichernde Bedeutung
vornehmlich zugunsten der schulpflichtigen Kinder und ihrer Eltern zu. . . . Kinder seien in
öffentlichen Pflichtschulen ohne jegliche Parteinahme des Staates und der ihn
repräsentierenden Lehrkräfte für christliche Bekenntnisse oder für andere religiöse und
weltanschauliche Überzeugungen zu unterrichten und zu erziehen.”).
the principle of practical harmony compel the conclusion that the parent’s right to the upbringing of their children and the religious freedom of the parents and the children must be repressed in favor of a teacher who wears a headscarf.52

In response to these results in the administrative courts, Ludin entered a complaint with the Federal Constitutional Court alleging that the administrative regulation of the SSA prohibiting her from wearing a headscarf while teaching violated her fundamental rights under the Basic Law.53 Unlike the administrative courts that uniformly rejected Ludin’s complaints, the Federal Constitutional Court ruled the prohibition as promulgated and implemented by the SSA legally insufficient54 to deprive Ludin of her religious freedom.55 But this holding is infirm because of its lack of guidance and the political controversy it has aroused.

B. The Majority Opinion in the German Headscarf Decision

The Federal Constitutional Court found Ludin’s complaint that the school authorities and the administrative courts had violated her right to religious freedom to be valid. Accordingly, the court found that the statutory scheme in place in Baden-Württemberg’s existing laws did not provide a “sufficiently clear legal basis”56 upon which to use an administrative decision to prohibit wearing headscarves while teaching. Proceeding from article 33, paragraph 2 of the Basic Law—under which every German enjoys equal access to every public office according to his eligibility, ability, and professional qualifications—the court noted that this access to employment in the civil service can indeed be limited by subjective acceptance criteria, as provided, for example, in the Law on Guidelines for Employment in the Civil Service [Beamtenrechtsrahmengesetz] and the Laws on State

54. See infra note 82 for a discussion of the principle that essential matters—such as the limitation of a fundamental right—are reserved to democratically elected legislatures that create the clear legal basis to guide any legislative delegation that results in the restriction of a fundamental right.
Civil Servants [Landesbeamtengesetzen]. In setting these criteria, the lawmaker has wide discretion. According to the court, the exercise of a fundamental right, such as the right to freedom of religious expression, by a civil servant while at work can be limited by the general demands of the position or by special requirements of the public office in question. Even in the prognostic decision on the future official activities of someone applying for a position, the state as an employer still has wide discretion that can only be reviewed narrowly by the courts.

But in the Headscarf Decision problems arose from article 4 of the Basic Law, whose scope in protecting religious freedom the court recapitulated based on earlier decisions. The religious freedom ubiquitously guaranteed by article 4 also encompasses the right to profess and to preach one’s faith and to base all of one’s behavior on the teachings of one’s religion. Religious convictions that dictate one behavior as the correct way to cope with circumstances are also protected by article 4. Because the article 4 rights of religious


58. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (296), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3111), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 34.


61. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (297), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3112), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 37; cf. Decision of Oct. 16, 1968, BVerfGE 24, 236 (245) (holding that article 4 of the Basic Law not only guarantees the freedom to have or not to have religious convictions but also the freedom to teach and spread such convictions).

62. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (297), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3112), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 37; cf. Decision of Dec. 17, 1975, BVerfGE 41, 29 (49) (reasoning that article 4 of the Basic Law not only prohibits the state from intruding into the area of an
freedom are guaranteed unconditionally, \(^{63}\) any limitations on these rights must also arise directly from the Basic Law. \(^{64}\) “In addition, the limitation of the unconditionally guaranteed freedom of religion requires a sufficiently clear legal basis.” \(^{65}\) Accordingly, any limitation of article 4 rights is subject to especially strict justification demands.

The court considered wearing a headscarf to be a right protected by article 4’s guarantee of religious freedom. The court rightly supported its position on the subjective conviction of the complainant and not on the question of whether Islam generally and universally requires women to wear a headscarf. \(^{66}\) In any event, according to the court, it is enough if the obligation to wear a headscarf can plausibly fall under article 4. \(^{67}\) Incidentally, all earlier courts had also reached this conclusion in an unobjectionable way.

As other constitutional rights that might potentially collide with the right to religious freedom, the court identified the state educational mandate, \(^{68}\) the parents’ right to upbringing, \(^{69}\) and the negative individual’s religious freedom but also requires positive action on the part of the state to allow for the active exercise of one’s convictions); Decision of April 11, 1972, BVerfGE 33, 23 (28) (stating that religious freedom guarantees more than just the freedom to believe or not to believe what one wishes—it also guarantees that right to orient one’s entire behavior to the tenets of one’s faith and to act according to one’s convictions); Decision of Oct. 19, 1971, BVerfGE 32, 98 (106) (noting that freedom of religion in Germany also protects religious convictions that determine a certain way to react to situations in life as the best way to overcome such circumstances even if the religion does not demand such behavior).

\(^{63}\) Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (297), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3112), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 38.

\(^{64}\) Id.; cf. Decision of May 26, 1970, BVerfGE 28, 243 (260) (holding that limitations on the right to conscientious objection cannot be justified based merely on laws, norms, and institutions, but rather can only be justified on colliding fundamental rights of third parties); see also Crucifix Decision (May 16, 1995), BVerfGE 93, 1 (21) (same).

\(^{65}\) Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (297), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3112), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 38 (citing Decision of Nov. 27, 1990, BVerfGE 83, 130 (142)).


\(^{67}\) Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (299), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3112), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 40.

\(^{68}\) GG art. 7, para. 1 (“The entire education system is under the supervision of the state.”).

\(^{69}\) GG art. 6, para. 2 (“Care and upbringing of children are the natural right of the parents and a duty primarily incumbent on them. The state watches over the performance of this duty.”).
The German Headscarf Debate

665]

religious freedom of the schoolchildren. But the court then applied the religion/worldview neutrality required of the state only to the state itself and not to representatives of the state—e.g., public school teachers—who parents and schoolchildren admittedly cannot choose themselves. The court straightforwardly explained that the necessary latitude for the active exercise of one’s religious convictions and the realization of one’s autonomous personality or individuality also belong under article 4’s protections:

The State singly may not exercise a conscious influence for the benefit of a specific political, ideological, or worldview perspective, or identify itself either expressly or impliedly with a particular faith or worldview through measures that either proceed from it or that are attributed to it and thereby endanger the religious peace in society.

Similarly, aside from the obligatory nature of public school, the court noted that, irrespective of their negative religious freedom, students and parents do not have the right to avoid confrontation with foreign confessions of faith, acts of worship, and religious symbols.

The court recognized in detail the right of the Länder to create the public school system and to ban improper influences from schools. The religiously motivated clothing of a teacher, which also may be interpreted as a statement of a teacher’s religious convictions, could also have this effect, according to the court. With reference to the distinction used by the police between abstract and concrete danger, the court found that a teacher wearing a headscarf in an obligatory state school only entails an abstract danger—only the possibility of harm or a conflict. But the limitation of an

70. GG art. 4, para. 1 (“Freedom of faith and of conscience, and freedom of creed religious or ideological, are inviolable.”); see also Crucifix Decision (May 16, 1995), BVerfGE 93, 1 (4), (21–24) (ruling that Bavarian Länder regulations requiring crucifixes to hang in classrooms in public schools violated students’ negative religious freedom, or the freedom not to adopt a certain belief).
73. Id.
unconditionally guaranteed fundamental right requires a sufficiently clear legal basis, which the court found missing in this case, in part apparently supported by this standard from the police of a lack of concrete danger posed by a teacher wearing a headscarf.\textsuperscript{76} That is, even though the applicant made clear from the beginning that she was not willing to comply with the headscarf prohibition, the court only found this to constitute an abstract possible danger which did not justify the current intrusion into this fundamental right.\textsuperscript{77} The court considered the fact that no tangible clues were visible to identify any concrete danger.\textsuperscript{78} Future conflicts will thus need other regulations.\textsuperscript{79} Furthermore, the teachers’ general obligations of restraint did not substantiate a policy prohibiting the wearing of certain clothing or other symbols at school.\textsuperscript{80} But the court found that the \textit{Land} legislatures were free to provide the previously missing legal basis for such a prohibition by reevaluating, within the framework of the constitutional requirements, the allowable degree with which references to religion may appear in the school.\textsuperscript{81} This would put an applicant on notice (as they were already) that eligibility for employment in this field might be denied if the applicant reveals from the beginning that he or she cannot adopt the required restraint, for example, by not committing to refrain from wearing such symbols.

The Federal Constitutional Court’s approach to the issue of teachers wearing an Islamic headscarf in public school is significantly flawed. Legally, the determining factor for the Federal Constitutional Court was that the question of eligibility for employment in the civil service cannot be decided by an administrative education authority familiar with the problem, although that has previously been the case with generally satisfactory results. The court held that the \textit{Wesentlichkeitstheorie}, or “theory of essentiality,”\textsuperscript{82} demands that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{76} Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (308), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3115), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{77} Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (309), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3115), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 62.
  \item \textsuperscript{78} Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (312), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3116), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 69. The \textit{Wesentlichkeitstheorie} is a principle of German constitutional and administrative law concerning the legality of administration. Two main principles govern the

680
democratically elected legislators issue these types of regulations because they have an assessment prerogative at their disposal, unlike administrators and judges.\textsuperscript{82} In fact, the court reasoned that agencies and courts could not claim such a prerogative for themselves.\textsuperscript{84} Specifically, the court substantiated this position with the principles of parliamentary reservation of material issues [\textit{Parlamentsvorbehalte}], the constitutional state founded on the rule of law [\textit{Rechtsstaatsprinzip}],\textsuperscript{85} and the democratic imperative
In order to realize fundamental rights, the court held, the controlling regulations must be laid out in law. In any case, the lawgiver is committed to determine on its own the contours of conflicting guaranteed freedoms as far as such a determination is material for the exercise of these freedoms. The court noted that the power to limit fundamental freedoms and to balance colliding fundamental rights are powers reserved to the parliament under the Basic Law. This applies especially to schools, the court found, where the teachers’ obligations have previously not been sufficiently defined.

The Headscarf Decision will result in further heated political arguments. Such controversy is even more likely since the court uncharacteristically failed to provide instruction as to what such a valid regulation should contain. The court might have made this omission because none of the numerous other courts (including the Federal Administrative Court) or the Land legislatures had treated the problem and the prevailing principle in the debate about these questions in quite this way before. One more problematic aspect of the court’s decision is that it does not grant an adequate transition period for the Länder to develop a new constitutionally sufficient legal basis for a headscarf prohibition. This has created a legal vacuum: between the day of the Decision and the forthcoming and possibly conflicting regulations currently being developed in the Länder, a public school teacher may not be prohibited from wearing

87. Id. The democratic imperative [Demokratiegebot], the Rechtsstaatsprinzip, and the parliamentary reservation [Parlamentsvorbehalt] together “require that essential matters cannot be regulated by delegated legislation but have to be dealt with by Parliament itself.” FOSTER & SULE, supra note 82, at 196. See supra note 82 for a brief summary of the legality of administrative acts and the Wesentlichkeitstheorie.
88. Id.; cf. Decision of Nov. 27, 1990, BVerfGE 83, 130 (142).
91. See, e.g., Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (302–03), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3113–14), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 47 (noting merely that, in creating a sufficiently clear legal basis for a prohibition, a Land can consider certain factors such as the colliding rights at issue, the school tradition in that Land, and the denominational composition of the local population, but failing to list concrete criteria that would assure the validity of a new prohibition).
a headscarf while teaching. Neither the case law nor the academic literature to date suggest that a civil servant’s official duties must be established by law if they relate to religious freedom, as noted by the sounder dissenting opinion.

C. The Dissenting Opinion

Substantively, the dissenters in the Headscarf Decision emphasized the role a teacher plays as a representative of the state. In this context, the dissent notes the significance of the fact that “whoever wishes to become a civil servant freely chooses to side with the state.”93 Thus, “right from the beginning, teachers who are civil servants, by their status as civil servants, do not enjoy the same protection of their fundamental rights as do parents and schoolchildren. Rather, teachers are bound to fundamental rights because they take part in the exercise of public power.”94 The relationship of a teacher to the state is an exceptionally close one.95 Still, the teacher in the capacity of teacher is not a mere “executive instrument” [Vollzugsinstrument] of the state by nature of this relationship.96 Nevertheless,

[he who wishes to become a civil servant must nevertheless identify himself with the constitutional state in important fundamental questions and in the performance of his official responsibilities because the State is also represented by the official service of the teacher and therefore is identified with the actual individual so serving. All principles of the civil service are governed by this idea of mutuality and proximity.]97

Essentially, the civil servant, properly understood, waives his or her constitutional rights that are not compatible with the position of

93. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (315), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3117), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 77 (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting) (“Wer Beamter wird, stellt sich in freier Willensentschließung auf die Seite des Staates.”).
94. Id. (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting).
96. Id. (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting).
97. Id. (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting) (“Wer Beamter werden will, muss sich jedoch mit dem Verfassungsstaat in wichtigen Grundsatzfragen und bei der Wahrnehmung seiner dienstlichen Aufgaben loyal identifizieren, weil umgekehrt auch der Staat durch seinen öffentlichen Dienst repräsentiert und deshalb mit dem konkreten Bediensten identifiziert wird. Von dieser Idee der Gegenseitigkeit und der Nähe sind alle Grundsätze des Berufbeamentums beherrscht.”).
civil service at issue—here, teachers in a public, obligatory state school. “The majority did not take sufficient account of this structural difference” between the relationship of a normal citizen to the state and that of a civil servant.98

The dissenting opinion also criticizes the court’s apparent equation of the eligibility determination in the framework of the special equality clause in article 33, paragraph 2 of the Basic Law—which guarantees all citizens equal access to employment in the civil service—with state interference with religious freedom guaranteed by article 4, paragraph 1 of the Basic Law.99 The conflation of these two constitutional provisions is novel and cannot be allowed.100 In contrast, according to the dissent, the intrusion by the state into the sphere of normal citizens is normally a prerequisite for a claim that such classic rights and freedoms have been violated.101 But the dissent points out that, in the case of a civil servant job applicant in a public school (i.e., a teacher) the state is not intruding into the sphere of ordinary citizens; rather, a bearer of fundamental rights is seeking affiliation with the state apparatus and thus associates with the state, or the fundamental rights addressee [Grundrechtsadressaten].102 However, the dissent notes that a civil servant’s freedom while in service is limited from the beginning by the nature of the circumstances and, above all, by the constitutional form of the office.103

Finally, the dissent sharply criticizes another aspect of the court’s opinion that bears mention here as problematic. The dissent notes that the court seems to ignore clear constitutional mandates in finding that the regulatory prohibition on wearing a headscarf while teaching does not proceed from a “sufficiently clear legal basis”104

101. Cf. id. (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting).
102. Id. (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting).
103. Id. (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting).
104. Cf. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (306), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3115), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 57 (establishing that there was not a “sufficiently clear legal basis” for the administrative decision that Ludin was not qualified according to the eligibility criteria for employment in the civil service because of her continued refusal to teach without her headscarf).
and in finding that in order to prohibit teachers from wearing headscarves, the Länder needed to legislate and create a “sufficiently clear legal basis.” But the Basic Law itself provides the legal basis for a determination that a civil servant who categorically refuses to remove a headscarf while on the job does not meet the eligibility criteria for employment in the civil service. Thus, “[u]ncompromisingly insisting on wearing a headscarf while teaching in a public school, as the complainant has done, is not compatible with the [constitutional] imperative of moderation and neutrality required of a civil servant.”

III. ANALYSIS OF THE FLAWED MAJORITY OPINION IN THE HEADSCARF DECISION

A. Why the Court Got It Wrong

At first glance, the Headscarf Decision seems to be doctrinally consistent with case law. Existing case law has long merited the approval of relevant academic literature. The Decision confirms, in the first place, previous arguments in case law and literature for religious/worldview neutrality in the sense of openness and promotion—in contrast to the French type of exclusionary laicism, or secularization, that is not and should not be valid in Germany. In the Headscarf Decision, the court has reemphasized the legal equality of all religions and worldviews, but has also indicated that not every kind of behavior of an individual, as subjectively

106. GG art. 33, para. 2; see also Decision of Feb. 21, 1995, BVerfGE 92, 140 (151); Decision of July 8, 1997, BVerfGE 96, 189 (197).
111. See infra text accompanying notes 149–71 for a discussion of the French approach to religious neutrality and why Germany should not ascribe to it.
interpreted by that individual to be an expression of protected religious freedom, can be seen as such. The court demands plausibility in order to find any given behavior within the protected realm of freedom of religion and conscience. But despite appearance to the contrary, the Headscarf Decision leaves a conflicting impression in many ways.

1. Deciding not to decide

The court conspicuously avoids taking a position on a religious question in the Decision by returning the issue to the Land legislatures. This is reminiscent of two recent reactions by the court to questions of religious freedom. First, the court avoided adjudicating the merits of such a question in the case concerning the Land of Brandenburg’s worldview and ethics course known as LER. In the LER case, the Land Brandenburg was accused of violating the state’s obligation to religious/worldview neutrality because the “religious sciences” [Religionskunde] aspect of the LER curriculum was considered generally hostile toward religion. The LER case ended with a court-suggested settlement after the court granted the Land five years to dismantle its controversial position, thus never proceeding to a judgment on the merits. Second, the court’s Kosher Butcher Decision concerned a prohibition on slaughtering animals without anesthesia for religious reasons. In the Kosher Butcher Decision, the court simply passed the problem of...
The German Headscarf Debate

protecting animal welfare on to the Executive, which the court charged to ensure that animal welfare interests be observed in individual cases “through side determinations and by supervision of their observance as well as through examination of expert studies and the personal qualification of the claimant also in relation to the particular skills required for kosher butchering.” 119 The court proceeded in a similar responsibility-shifting fashion in the Headscarf Decision.

There has apparently never been an attempt to challenge the constitutional protection of wearing a headscarf for religious reasons under the protections of the free exercise of religion. Even civil servants are permitted to wear headscarves in public while not working. The only point of contention is whether this freedom is restricted while engaged in the civil service. To this extent, the Headscarf Decision offers little new insight. As expressed by the dissenting opinion, “[t]he court has failed its duty to answer a basic constitutional question even though that case was justiciable.” 120 The German news magazine Der Spiegel formulated it much more concisely: the court has unfortunately “decided not to decide.” 121

2. Contradicting prior case law and departing from foundational principles

In addition to shifting responsibility, the Headscarf Decision also contradicts prior case law. The court has previously emphasized the primacy of protecting children and teenagers from various dangers to their development. 122 It was in this vein that the court issued its Crucifix Decision. 123 This line of reasoning played no part in the

119. Id. at 348 (“durch Nebenbestimmungen und die Überwachung ihrer Einhaltung ebenso wie bei der Prüfung der Sachkunde und der persönlichen Eignung des Antragstellers auch in Bezug auf die besonderen Fertigkeiten des Schächtens”); see also Karl-Hermann Kastner, Das tierschutzrechtliche Verbot des Schächtens aus der Sicht des Bundesverfassungsgerichts [The Animal Welfare Prohibition on Kosher Butchering from the Perspective of the Federal Constitutional Court], JZ 57 (2002), 491.

120. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (337), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3121), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 133 (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting) (“Der Aufgabe, eine verfassungsrechtliche Grundsatzfrage zu beantworten, ist der Senat nicht gerecht geworden, obwohl der Fall entscheidungsreif ist.”).

121. Dominik Cziesche et al., Das Kreuz mit dem Koran [The Cross with the Qur’an], DER SPIEGEL, Sept. 29, 2003, at 82.

122. Decision of Nov. 27, 1990, BVerfGE 83, 130 (140).

123. Crucifix Decision (May 16, 1995), BVerfGE 93, 1.
Headscarf Decision. But a piece of clothing conspicuously displayed by a teacher for religious reasons arguably makes a bigger impression than does the familiar symbol of a cross or crucifix. A crucifix or cross typically hangs on the wall with no missionary intentions, hanging instead as a simple “trademark” of a constitutionally permitted type of school. 124 Even though the cross does not appear in certain schools for religious reasons, but rather may appear as a cultural symbol and trademark of a type of school and its curriculum, the court unduly complicated “learning under the cross” 125 in the Crucifix Decision.

Wearing a headscarf, by contrast, is seen in the Headscarf Decision as possibly meaning something very different, 126 even though no one doubts that the teacher in this case wore a headscarf as a manifestation of her religious convictions. Additionally, the court does not discuss the perception horizon of the children at the developmental age who are obligated to go to school. Quoting itself, the court notes that, in a society that gives room to different religious convictions, there is no right “to be spared contact with different religious statements, rites, and symbols,” 127 but then leaves the actual problem unsolved. This is not about people being exposed to religious impressions on the street, but rather it concerns “a situation created by the state in which the individual is exposed to the influence of a specific faith, to the actions in which this faith manifests itself, and to the symbols in which this faith is represented.” 128 It is surprising that the court does not discuss further the extent to which the state can legally force parents to


expose children to a religious influence conveyed by a headscarf by means of general compulsory education.

Finally, the foundational principles regarding the legal position of civil servants are completely repealed with this Decision. The relationship between article 33, paragraph 3 and article 4, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Basic Law, the applicability of fundamental rights to the law governing civil servants, determinations of qualification, and eligibility for employment in the civil service according to article 33, paragraph 3 of the Basic Law are all abolished with the comment that fundamental rights are of ultimate importance.129

3. Catering to politics and special interests

Fundamental political decisions are also at play in this Decision, and these must be dissimulated. It is not the case that three or five percent of the population of Germany is Muslim; rather, in some parts of Germany that number is sixty or ninety percent.130 Behind these Muslims, as behind the claimant teacher in the Headscarf Decision, stand powerful special interest groups that have expressed their desire to change society.131 Allowing teachers to wear headscarves will not be the end of it; these special interest groups will only stop once they have effected change in all social institutions: state registrars, judges, and policewomen, all who insist on wearing headscarves, and even possibly policemen with turbans. These are the problems that lurk in the background. In this respect, this Decision is not helpful but ominous. To this extent, one must also question the comments about neutrality in the Decision. The objective effect of this Decision is that the state appears to identify itself with the teacher who functions by mandate of the state and in its name not only in the content and nature of the lessons that she teaches, but also in the striking potential effect of her religiously toned clothing.

We do not need to decide what to do with nuns and monks who are so often and gladly mentioned in this context because they uniformly appear in their respective manner of dress in private parochial schools; otherwise we would have had corresponding cases and

130. BUNDESTAGSDRUCKSACHE 14/4530, at 9.
131. Id. at 66.
treatments in the relevant academic literature decades ago in Germany. Under these circumstances, it is even perplexing that the majority opinion in the Headscarf Decision speaks only generally about a “piece of clothing” [Kleidungsstück] and compares this with a simple Christian or Muslim piece of jewelry on a necklace. In this respect, the court surpasses even France’s *laïcité*, which exempts normal pieces of jewelry that are not ostentatiously large from the prohibition of religious symbols at school.

B. Why the Dissent Got It Right

In accord with the dissenting opinion, it is crucial to distinguish between citizens who are subject by law to compulsory education in public schools on the one hand, and applicants for positions as teachers who have voluntarily chosen to become part of the state apparatus as civil servants in those state schools, on the other. Previously—and irrespective of differing legal rationales—it was undisputed that a civil servant could not rely to the same extent on the effect of fundamental rights that guarantee freedom as could the normal citizen. A citizen’s fundamental rights are directed against the state, and the school teacher, as part of the state apparatus, is a primary addressee of that citizen’s fundamental rights. Naturally, the teacher also has fundamental rights. The teacher’s rights are not dismissed out of hand. But they experience a limitation in the interest of the civil servant’s position; the extent of the limitation depends on the nature of the office in question. Teachers carry their own pedagogical responsibility, not in the cognition of their own freedom, but rather on behalf of the state and under its control. The dissenting opinion expresses this idea.

The Decision of the Federal Constitutional Court does not dispute this in any way. The court merely explains that the formulation of the duties of civil servants cannot be substantiated by state administrative channels, as has previously been the case. The actual loser in this Decision, therefore, is the state administration.

133. See infra Part IV.A for a discussion of French secular humanism, or *laïcité*.
134. See supra text accompanying notes 93–108.
The court is demanding a shift of importance from the executive to the legislative branch.\textsuperscript{136} The court does not dispute that the state regulates the uniform loyalty to the law and the constitution of the administration with the duties of civil servants in the domestic sphere. The only question is how far the state regulation must go; that is, how much discretion does the hiring official in the field have?

The scope of civil servants’ fundamental rights has been hammered out in the debate surrounding what has previously been termed “special relationships of power” [\textit{Besondere Gewaltverhältnisse}]. But the term “special relationship of power” became uncommon in constitutional jurisprudence because a relation of power can be associated with a contradiction to a relationship of law [\textit{Rechtsverhältnis}].\textsuperscript{137} That is why other terms became common—without harming the substantive meaning—such as “special relationships of law” [\textit{Sonderrechtsverhältnisse}], “special connection” [\textit{Sonderbindung}], “heightened relationship of dependence” [\textit{gesteigertes Abhängigkeitsverhältnis}], “special relationship of duties” [\textit{besonderes Pflichtenverhältnis}], and “special status” [\textit{Sonderstatus}]. All of these terms still describe relationships of law “that are characterized by an especially close connection of the individual who stands in such a position through state power.”\textsuperscript{138}

The relationship of the civil servant and the school always appears next to the relationship of the soldier and of the prisoner to the state in this context of special relationships that might affect the fundamental rights of those involved in the relationships.

Undoubtedly, fundamental rights are still valid even in these special relationships.\textsuperscript{139} But the nature of their validity constitutes a

\textsuperscript{136} Cf. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (336), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3121), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 131 (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting).

\textsuperscript{137} Wolfgang Loschelder, \textit{Grundrechte im Sonderstatus} [Fundamental Rights in the Special Status], 5 \textsc{Handbuch des Staatsrechts} [\textsc{Handbook of State Law}] § 123 n.6 (1992); see also Konrad Hesse, \textit{Grundzüge des Verfassungsrechts der Bundesrepublik Deutschland} [\textit{Principles of the Constitutional Law of the Federal Republic of Germany}] marginal no. 321 (20th ed. 1995).

\textsuperscript{138} 1 Ingo von Munch, \textit{Grundgesetzkommentar} [\textit{Commentary on the Basic Law}] Vorb. arts. 1–19, marginal no. 59 (5th ed. 2000); see also Christian Starck, in 1 \textit{Grundgesetzkommentar} [\textit{Commentary on the Basic Law}] art. 1, marginal no. 255 (Von Mangoldt et al. eds., 4th ed. 1999).

\textsuperscript{139} See Loschelder, supra note 137, § 123 n.6; see also Hesse, supra note 137, at marginal no. 321. Older legal perspectives were overcome especially in the jurisprudence of the Federal Constitutional Court. \textit{See}, e.g., Strafgefangenen-Entscheidung [Prisoner Decision] (Mar. 14, 1972), BVerfGE 33, 1. For expressions of this change in the area of public schools,
legal problem. Here we are obviously dealing with legal relationships that demand a special type of protection of freedom since their nature differs from the general relationship of citizens to the state. It would exceed the comprehensive legal bounds of state power if fundamental rights could be restricted arbitrarily or by discretion in such relationships of special status. Therefore, in the words of the Federal Constitutional Court, even in such special relationships, a restriction of fundamental rights may be considered

only if the restriction is indispensable for the achievement of the community oriented goals covered by the value regime of the Basic Law and in constitutional forms provided for there. . . . Thus, it may only occur through a law or on the basis of a law . . . , which will, however, not be able to dispense with blanket clauses that are as narrowly tailored as possible.  

Examples of such “constitutional forms” provided for in the Basic Law for justifying restrictions of fundamental rights within these special relationships include constitutional determinations for the military,  for the establishment of the civil service,  for the

---

140. Prisoner Decision, BVerfGE 33, 1 (11) (“nur dann in Betracht, wenn sie zur Erreichung eines von der Wertordnung des Grundgesetzes gedeckten gemeinschaftsbezogenen Zweckes unerläßlich ist und in den dafür verfassungsrechtlich vorgesehenen Formen geschieht. . . also nur durch Gesetz oder auf Grund eines Gesetzes . . . , das allerdings auf—möglichst eng begrenzte—Generalklauseln nicht wird verzichten können”).

141. GG art. 17a. This article provides:

(1) Laws concerning military services and alternative service may by provisions applying to members of the Armed Forces and of alternative services during their period of military or alternative service, restrict the basic right freely to express and to disseminate opinions by speech, writing, and pictures (Article 5, paragraph (1) first half-sentence), the basic right of assembly (Article 9), and the right of petition (Article 17) insofar as it permits to address requests or complaints jointly with others.

(2) Laws for defense purposes, including the protection of the civilian population may provide for the restriction of the basic rights of freedom of movement (Article 11) and inviolability of the home (Article 13).

142. GG art. 33, paras. 4–5. These paragraphs determine that

(4) The exercise of state authority as a permanent function shall as a rule be entrusted to members of the public service whose status, service and loyalty are governed by public law.

(5) The law of the public service shall be regulated with due regard to the traditional principles of the permanent civil service.
The German Headscarf Debate

public school system,\textsuperscript{143} and for the penal system.\textsuperscript{144} Thus, the scope of fundamental rights is restricted by general rules in these “state internal areas” [\textit{staatlichen Innenbereichen}] of particular obligation. Naturally, the restriction will conform to the characteristics of the particular state-organized sphere.

Case law has deepened the legal questions surrounding the relationships of special status. Until recently, many have taken for granted that only “material” questions regarding these relationships should be reserved for the legislature.\textsuperscript{145} Certain specific duties are circumscribed by these general rules even in civil service and education law. However, details about the specific duties necessarily rest with administrative bodies.

The headscarf conflict repeats this debate about what role the legislature plays in this context, and the court has apparently assumed the equality of the fundamental rights of civil servants, on the one hand, and of citizens who are subject to state compulsion

\textsuperscript{143} GG art. 7. This article concerns the State’s role in education in Germany:

\textsuperscript{(1)} The entire education system is under the supervision of the state.

\textsuperscript{(2)} The persons entitled to bring up a child have the right to decide whether they shall receive religious instruction.

\textsuperscript{(3)} Religious instruction forms part of the ordinary curriculum in state and municipal schools, excepting secular schools. Without prejudice to the state’s right of supervision, religious instruction is given in accordance with the tenets of the religious communities. No teacher may be obliged against his will to give religious instruction.

\textsuperscript{(4)} The right to establish private schools is guaranteed. Private schools as a substitute for state or municipal schools, require the approval of the state and are subject to the laws of the Laender. This approval must be given if private schools are not inferior to the state or municipal schools in their educational aims, their facilities and the professional training of their teaching staff, and if a segregation of the pupils according to the means of the parents is not promoted. This approval must be withheld if the economic and legal position of the teaching staff is not sufficiently assured.

\textsuperscript{(5)} A private elementary school shall be admitted only if the educational authority finds that it serves a special pedagogic interest or if, on the application of persons entitled to bring up children, it is to be established as an interdenominational or denominational or ideological school and a state or municipal elementary school of this type does not exist in the community.

\textsuperscript{(6)} Preparatory schools remain abolished.

\textsuperscript{144} GG art. 74, no. 1 (“Concurrent legislative powers extend to the following matters: 1. civil law, criminal law and execution of sentences, the system of judicature, the procedure of the courts, the legal profession, notaries and legal advice . . . ”).

\textsuperscript{145} Decision of Dec. 21, 1977, BVerfGE 47, 46 (78–79); Decision of June 22, 1977, BVerfGE 45, 400 (417); Decision of Jan. 27, 1976, BVerfGE 41, 251 (259); Decision of Dec. 6, 1972, BVerfGE 34, 165 (192).
(students in obligatory schools, prisoners in the penal system, etc.), on the other. It seems to me that rather than equating the fundamental rights of these two, the court should have counted teachers as representatives of those owing fundamental rights and not as those who possess claims for freedom that are generally directed against the state. I also question whether it is helpful in a system such as the public school system to reserve material questions of education law to the legislature under the theory of essentiality [Wesentlichkeitstheorie]. The result will be a de facto limitation of the freedom of those subject to state compulsion in these areas and for whose benefit the theory of essentiality—the legal reservation of material questions to the legislature—has been expanded into education law. It has the effect of making obligatory state schools available to teachers as a stage on which they can develop their personalities through constitutionally protected fundamental rights, independent of the democratically determined school system. German schools have not experienced problems in this area before; contrary to many of its neighbors, Germany enjoys peace at school.

IV. HEADSCARVES IN FRANCE

Understandably, an investigation of the headscarf debate shifts from Germany to France. The headscarf has been the cause of disturbance and controversy in the public schools in France for approximately the last twenty years. And as recently as February 10, 2004, a so-called laïcité law has passed the National Assembly in its first reading. It might seem at first blush that Germany could profit

146. For a general treatment, see Böckenförde, supra note 28.
147. For a discussion of the Wesentlichkeitstheorie, or the “theory of essentiality,” see supra note 82 and sources cited there.
148. Compare infra Part IV for a treatment of the situation in France.
from the experiences in France. But this is not so since the systems
differ so widely from each other.150

A. Background to France’s Approach to the Headscarf Problem

According to its Constitution of 1958, the French Republic is a
secular republic, “une République . . . laïque.” A radical separation
of church and state has prevailed for the last one hundred years in
France.151 The reasons for this stem from an understanding of the
laicism, or the secularism, that banished religion from the public
sphere and state institutions, especially from the public schools, and
that prescribed ignoring religion and oppressing its expression.152
While religious freedom reigns in Germany and every individual has
the right “to orient his whole bearing on the teachings of his faith
and to act according to his inward and outward faith and
convictions,”153 French law relegates the exercise of religion to the
private sphere. Accordingly, even Muslim schoolchildren in France
have been forbidden to express their religious conviction as
adherents of Islam by wearing a headscarf.

It is difficult to understand this radically different state of affairs
between Germany and France without some historical insight.154
Ultra-Catholic and anticlerical excesses had ruptured French society
since the French Revolution.155 The separation law of December 9,
1905,156 was meant to take care of this poisoning conflict once and
for all by forbidding any sort of recognition or support of churches

150. VON CAMPENHAUSEN, LAW OF CHURCH AND STATE, supra note 1, at 393–407.
151. See generally VON CAMPENHAUSEN, supra note 149.
152. Id. at 86–113.
Lehren seines Glaubens auszurichten und seiner inneren und äußeren Glaubensüberzeugung
gemäß zu handeln”); see also Decision of Oct. 16, 1968, BVerfGE 24, 236 (246).
154. See generally VON CAMPENHAUSEN, LAW OF CHURCH AND STATE, supra note 1, at
393–407. See also the recent sources listed in Heun, supra note 149.
155. CULTURE WARS. SECULAR-CLERICAL CONFLICT IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
EUROPE (Christopher Clark & Wolfram Kaiser eds., 2003); STATHIS N. KALYVAS, THE RISE
OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE (1996); HUGH McLEOD, RELIGION AND THE
156. Loi du 9 décembre 1905 [Law of Dec. 9, 1905], C. adm. 787 (Fr.) (23rd ed. 1994)
[hereinafter Law of 1905], reprinted in German in GIACOMETTI, QUELLEN ZUR GESCHICHTE
DER TRENNUNG VON KIRCHE UND STAAT [SOURCES ON THE HISTORY OF THE SEPARATION
OF CHURCH AND STATE] 272 (1926); see also Hanna Clayson Smith, Comment, Liberté,
Égalité, et Fraternité at Risk for New Religious Movements in France, 2000 BYU L. REV. 1099,
1106–08 (introducing the Law of 1905).
by the state and by declaring anything religious to be a private matter.\textsuperscript{157} This approach overlooked the fact that, while the state and church \textit{institutions} can indeed be totally separated, this does not work for people because an individual can be both a citizen and a member of a religion.\textsuperscript{158} Even the external disentanglement produced unanticipated problems. For example, the cathedrals and churches nationalized during the French Revolution are still owned by the state even today. They are carried by the state but used by the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{159} Should they be closed? This was actually threatened at one point.\textsuperscript{160} This and many other repugnant developments were gradually curbed by thoughtful adjudication, especially by the Conseil d'État.\textsuperscript{161} The principle of radical laicism, or secularization, transformed into the more moderate principle of \textit{laïcité},\textsuperscript{162} which in many respects corresponds to the concept of neutrality in matters of religion and worldview.

The present situation in France is livable, since legal or merely factual breaches of the hallowed state-separation principle have mitigated its restrictions on religious freedom. Such breaches of the strict principle include, among other things, public schools granting one free day per week for the purpose of making it possible for students to obtain religious education outside of school. The situation has also been relaxed by the emigration of a large portion of society out of the public schools and into private, state-subsidized parochial schools. This accords with the modern understanding of religious freedom but not with the secularization principles of the

\textsuperscript{157} Metz, \textit{supra} note 149, at 103.

\textsuperscript{158} Id.

\textsuperscript{159} For this reason, the financing prohibition contained in the Law of 1905 could not be complied with in the manner prescribed in the law from the very beginning. Further ruptures have come in the course of the last ninety-nine years. See A. Boyer, \textit{Le Droit des Religions en France} [The Right of Religions in France] 126 (1993); Basdevant-Gaudemet, \textit{supra} note 149, at 141.

\textsuperscript{160} The closing of these churches was prevented at the last minute by the Law of Jan. 2, 1907, which hardly revealed that something substantive was being revised. See Von Campenhausen, \textit{supra} note 149, at 7–9.

\textsuperscript{161} Id. at 116.

The German Headscarf Debate

separation law of 1905, which have never been abrogated. Rather, these principles live on latently in French society. Thus, laicism, or secularization, continues to pose a threat as an exclusionary principle that curtails religious freedom.

Jacques Chirac, the French President, clearly demonstrated the potential threat of France’s latent laicism in his speech of December 17, 2003. In the name of toleration and religious freedom, President Chirac rose up the standard of laïcité and demanded respect for it. In doing so, he did not appeal to what Germans refer to as the religious/worldview neutrality [die religiös-weltanschauliche Neutralität] of the schools; rather, he plead for a conception of public schools as a type of republican taboo zone, a “sanctuary” from which anything religious should be completely banned.

In this context, the new direction of recent French legislation belongs in the gestalt of the so-called laïcité law. Previously, the French legislature had hid behind the Conseil d’État, France’s preenforcement constitutional court. But the Conseil d’État has emphasized the principle of religious freedom and has only disallowed the wearing of headscarves in public school buildings when accompanied by provocative behavior. Schoolmasters had been given broad discretion to decide individual cases as they came up. But the pressure of militant Islamic organizations and the threat of Islamicization have caused headmasters to shrink from the responsibility of suspending such students from school. It is on this background that the French are creating this new laïcité law.

B. Germany Should Not Take the French Approach

The legal situations in France and Germany are fundamentally different. In Germany, which in comparison to other European

163. See Metz, supra note 149, at 142–43.
165. See Respekt der Laizität [Respect Laïcité], FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG FRANKFURT GENERAL NEWSPAPER, Jan. 29, 2004.
166. Id.
countries has long been a model country in the field of religious freedom,169 such mismatched fragments from the French experience cannot be simply adopted, especially since France espouses a more limited concept of religious freedom.170 The separation of church and state—that is, the autonomy and independence of state and church institutions—has thrived in Germany since 1919. In Germany, both church and state work together to further the citizens’ interest in matters that intersect the responsibilities of both institutions. This was prescribed by the Weimar Constitution of 1919 as much as it is by the Basic Law of today.171 Furthermore, the German prohibition on teachers wearing headscarves underscores the religious/worldview neutrality of the state—in this instance in the form of a teacher as the representative of the state school authority. France, on the contrary, is regulating the apparel of the schoolchildren and engaging in semantic subtleties to differentiate between jewelry and other adornments that are to be either allowed or disallowed in the future. It should not go that far in Germany.

V. CONCLUSION

The Land legislatures, which want to secure peace in their respective Länder by maintaining the status quo of not allowing teachers to wear headscarves, are not to be envied in their task. In contrast to other decisions, the court here provides no criteria by which a legislature may correctly enact a prohibition after striking down the administrative regulation employed by the state of Baden-Württemberg as insufficient to create a sufficient legal basis.172 New problems will also arise from the demand for concretization of


170. Heun, supra note 149, at 273, 276–79.


constitutional limitations in new laws.\textsuperscript{173} In the interest of equality, the different branches of the administrative state must be provided with specific regulations as well. Restrictions on religious freedom that are necessary in the civil service will then have to be weighed against the individual’s claim to fundamental rights. The equality issue sharpens the problem “because the legislative branch will have to develop consistent substantive distinguishing criteria for specific provisions that will need to include certain branches of the civil service, for example teachers, differently than other civil servants.”\textsuperscript{174}

Thus, it is true that a treatment providing a satisfactory result for problematic cases always becomes more complicated in the future. Previously, the administrative apparatus has been charged with determining the legal qualification and eligibility of applicants for positions in the civil service. It is unclear how a legislature—which is now required to formulate generally applicable and abstract regulations on the eligibility of civil servants for employment by the state—can be expected to do a better job of it. “An increase in legal certainty and equity in individual cases can hardly result from this Decision.”\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{173} Cf. Headscarf Decision, BVerfGE 108, 282 (336–37), NJW 56 (2003), 3111 (3121), 2 BvR 1436/02, para. 131 (Jentsch, Di Fabio & Mellinghoff, dissenting) (criticizing the majority for demanding the Länder to legislate in an area in which they explicitly did not want to legislate and that the new law must “concretize constitutional limitations” without giving any criteria by which to do so).


\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Id.} (“Ein Zuwachs an Rechtssicherheit und Einzelfälligrechtigkeit dürfte sich hierdurch schwerlich ergeben.”).