



### **Peter Widmann**

Dr. Peter Widmann (born in 1968) is a lecturer of political science at the European Institute of Istanbul's Bilgi University, where he is responsible for the development of the German Studies section. One of his research areas – aside from political communication, minority politics and racism - perceptions of Germany's Muslim community.

“It's very interesting, especially at this time, to explain to Turks the interwoven debates on Islam, German Turks and Turkey in Germany, where the main government party has positioned itself explicitly against the accession of Turkey to the EU,” says Widmann, who used to visit Turkey frequently before moving to Istanbul in 2010. To avoid oversimplified images of Germany and Germans, he explains, it is particularly important to highlight the conflicts within and among German political parties.

Widmann graduated with a degree in political science from the Free University in Berlin in 1995. His interest in minority groups and integration issues dates back to this time. During his studies Widmann worked at the [Centre for Research on Anti-Semitism](#) (ZfA) at the Technical University of Berlin. In 2002 he received a PhD summa cum laude from the Technical University of Berlin, accompanied by [a municipal award](#) for his dissertation “[An den Rändern der Städte. Sinti und Jenische in der deutschen Kommunalpolitik](#)” (On the Outskirts of Towns. Sinti and Yenish in German Local Politics).

From 2001 to 2004, Widmann was the lead researcher for a project on the history of German Criminal Biology, which explored the alleged relationship between criminal behaviour and race. From 2004 to 2010, he was an assistant professor at the Berlin Centre for Research on Anti-

Semitism (ZfA) and a lecturer at the Technical University of Berlin. Since 2008 he has researched and published on the perception of Germany's Muslims.

“With the enlargement of the EU and globalisation, fear of migration has become very strong in Germany,” says Widmann. “At the moment, this fear isn't related to losing jobs, but to the prospect of Germany's Islamisation. According to a few popular personalities in Germany, Islam is a threat to Germany's cultural identity. They perceive every new mosque as evidence of this threat.” These personalities include [Thilo Sarrazin](#) whose 2010 bestseller “Deutschland schafft sich ab” (Germany abolishes itself) forecasts the sweeping away of the country's identity by its growing Muslim community. In the essay “[The Merchants of Fear: Sarrazin vs. Muezzin](#)” (2010) for Bilgi University, Widmann analyses Sarrazin's book, concluding that it shows “a modernised form of racism that replaces the concept of race by a crude and static concept of culture.” For Widmann, another point of reference is the writing of publicist [Necla Kelek](#), who considers Islam to be incompatible with democracy and human rights. In a 2009 article, “[Irrational Demonisation](#)”, Widmann draws attention to the demonisation of Muslims “on the pretext of voicing criticism of Islam.”

In his interview with ESI, Widmann also mentions a positive change in the German debate: a rebellion by liberally minded intellectuals against prejudice towards Islam and Muslims. He also discusses recent statements by the political elite. (German president Christian Wulff said in October 2010 that Islam belongs to Germany and Chancellor Angela Merkel created waves with her claim that multiculturalism has failed.) Widmann also looks at the “two ongoing Turkey debates” in Germany. One, he says, focuses on the country and its policies. The other uses Turkey “as a projection screen” for multicultural conflicts in German society.