Outline of an international conference, which will take place at Tel Aviv University on April 6-8, 2008

Jews and Muslims in Germany:
Culture, Law and Politics
from the Age of Emancipation to the Time of Multiculturalism

**Academic Organizers:**
José Brunner, Director, Minerva Institute for German History, Tel Aviv University
Shai Lavi, Director, Taubenschlag Institute of Criminal Law, Tel Aviv University

**Rationale of Conference:**
Muslims compose the largest religious minority in Germany today. Their unique religious beliefs and practices, language and clothing, culture and life-style are increasingly seen as a challenge to the social cohesion of German society and stand at the center of public and legal debates. Despite differences of national origin and socio-economic background, Muslims are often referred to as a single group, and have become a source of anxiety, prejudice as well as legal and political controversy.

In the late 18th century and until World War II, Jews were a highly visible minority in Germany. In very similar terms to those of present-day Muslims, their unique religion and customs, language and clothing, culture and life-style created anxieties, prejudices and legal and political controversies. Today, the small Jewish community in Germany lives side by side the Muslim community, but due to a variety of reasons plays a very different role in the political arena.

What contribution can the study of the modern history of the Jewish community in Germany (as well as its current status) offer to our understanding of the present condition of Muslims in the country? What analogies can be drawn
between the assimilation and integration of Jews into German society in the early days of political emancipation and the current dilemmas facing the Muslims in an age of multiculturalism? What, despite noteworthy similarities, are the differences between the two histories of Jews and Muslims in Germany and what can these differences reveal?

Conference participants have been invited to reflect on the legal, political, social and cultural dimensions of this comparison and encouraged to focus on any of the following themes:

- **Tradition and Modernity:** What have been the different ways in which Muslim and Jewish communities in Germany confronted the challenges of modernization, above all those of its secularizing tendencies? What significance did phenomena such as "reform", "orthodoxy", "traditionalism" and "assimilation" and "fundamentalism" play in the encounter of Jewish and Muslim traditions with processes of modernization? What have been the legal and political responses of the German authorities to the various strategies pursued in this encounter? To what extent have both Jews and Muslims been conceived as representatives of a modernizing transnational, global or cosmopolitan entrepreneurial spirit, or of a pre-modern, traditional way of life?

- **Community:** In what sense can one speak of a distinct Jewish or Muslim "community"? What cultural, institutional, legal and political factors have influenced the collective self-understanding of these groups as minority communities, as well as the way in which they have been viewed by German society at large? What have been the centrifugal and centripetal forces that have played a role within the communities themselves? Are there distinctive demographic and economic features that distinguished the Jewish community from its social environment in 19th century Germany, and are there such features that are typical of the Muslim community? To what extent are these features similar or different from one another?

- **Law:** How do the histories of Jews and Muslims in Germany reflect changing conceptions of minority rights and citizenship? What political and legal avenues have the two communities pursued to further their legal status as minorities in German society? How did the improvement in the legal status of the Jews in the 19th century and of the Muslim community at the end of the 20th century affect the self-perception and public role of these two communities? How have questions concerning "freedom of religion" and other civil and political liberties been dealt with by German legislation and adjudication? To what extent did legal measures diminish or reinforce ethnic perspectives, such as transforming Jews into Germans of the Mosaic creed or Turks into Muslims? How have "dangerous" features of minority cultures and communities been dealt with in the legal arena?

- **Identity:** What challenges have the two minorities posed to different concepts of German national identity? To what extent have Jews and Muslims been confronted with a conception of German national identity that draws on a Christian heritage and in which this heritage still plays a role? What are the
ways in which the confrontation between the minority cultures and the German majority has been conceptualized as a religious, ethnic or social conflict? How have Jews and Muslims constructed their identity and how have they been constructed by popular culture and political and legal discourse as "outsiders," "strangers," and as posing a "threat" to German national identity? What are the main characteristics of Jewish and Muslim religion and culture that have been singled out as politically and legally controversial in the various periods?

- **Jewish-Muslim Interactions:** What role does the comparison of Jews and Muslims play in today's political and legal discourse in Germany? In what way do the two communities seek to stress their similarities and/or differences? To what extent have similar stereotypes been deployed in relation to both communities? How does the memory of the Holocaust affect contemporary German popular attitudes and legal measures affecting the Muslim community? How does the Muslim community in Germany relate to the Holocaust and its commemoration in post-war German culture? How do the Arab-Israeli conflict and other global issues and perspectives impact on German attitudes towards the Muslim and Jewish communities today? What role do they play in the self-definition of both communities as well as in the relations between Jews and Muslims?

The conference language will be English. The aim of the conference is not only to allow the presentation of papers, but also to provide the framework for a lively and fruitful discussion among participants. Participants will be invited to submit the revised and enlarged texts of their lectures for a volume to be edited within a relatively short time after the conference. The texts accepted for publication will appear in the *Tel Aviv Yearbook for German History*, vol. 37, scheduled to appear in March 2009.