The Europe We Need

EPC Issue Paper No. 8

What Perspectives for Islam and Muslims in Europe

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9 December 2003

Preface

The objective of this paper is to provide the historical backdrop and current context necessary to engage in a comprehensive debate on the challenges facing multicultural societies in Europe. It is designed to stimulate an initial discussion and is not meant to provide definitive answers or guidelines to the complex questions raised by the increasing importance of Islamic communities, which are now part of European society and of relations between the EU and the Islamic world. It does not attempt to be comprehensive in its approach but is intended as a contribution to an ongoing debate.

Introduction

Since the Iranian revolution of 1978-79, the issue of Islam and its supposed challenge to the West has become a matter of enduring international preoccupation,[1] which politicians within western European states, as well as a number of Islamic leaders, have chosen to highlight. Today, some 12.5 million Muslims live in Europe, compared to only 800 000 Muslims in 1950, and around 10 million in the US.[2] Islam is no longer only a foreign policy matter, but has turned into a domestic issue that needs to be addressed at local, national and European levels. Muslim

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[1] Islam and the Myth of Confrontation, Fred Halliday, I.B. Tauris 2003
[2] For detailed estimates of the number of Muslims in Europe please see Appendix I.

communities have grown rapidly in Europe in recent decades and Islam has emerged as the second religion in many European states.

However, recent international events, particularly the aftermath of 9/11, have created an unfavourable climate for many Muslims in Europe and have led to misperception and inaccurate stereotyping which risk making the "clash of civilizations" a reality. Political developments in Muslim countries (in the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan and in the Balkans) have had an impact on Muslim communities in Europe and have led European governments to consider events within the Muslim world with greater attention. The President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, identified the subject of "Islam and Muslims in Europe" as an important issue for Europe. Furthermore, the EU decision to reinvigorate the socio-cultural dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the 1999 decision to accept Turkey as an applicant country further demonstrate the importance of dialogue and improved understanding of Islam.

Just as there is no unified Muslim society in Europe, there is also no common European understanding and policy towards Europe's Muslim citizens. It is no longer possible to understand the history and the social evolution of Europe without taking into account its Muslim component.[3]

A brief history

It is difficult to define and generalize about Islam. According to Bernard Lewis, Islam in one sense denotes a religion, a system of belief and worship; in another sense, it connotes the civilization that grew up and flourished under the aegis of that religion. The word Islam denotes more than 14 centuries of history, 1.3 billion people, and a religious and cultural tradition of enormous diversity, geographically extending from Morocco to Indonesia, from Kazakhstan to Senegal.[4]

From the beginning of the sixteenth century a new relationship between Islam and the West developed. Europe ended centuries of Muslim rule and pursued their former masters into their homelands – the Spaniards and Portuguese into Africa and the Russians into Asia, thus launching the process of European expansion which by the twentieth century had forced the whole world into its economic, political, and cultural orbit. [5] A great change came with the occupation of Egypt in 1798 by Napoleon Bonaparte. This marked the beginning of inter-European rivalry over the Arab Provinces of the Ottoman Empire and its first significant geopolitical

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[3] Stefano Allievi, Multiculturalism in Europe, Muslims in Europe, post 9/11, St Anthony's College and Princeton University 25-26 April, 2003, Conference report.
[4] Bernhard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam, Weidenfeld and Nicholson 2003.
[5] Bernhard Lewis, The Arabs in History, Oxford University Press 1993

loss. These events destroyed the illusion of the unchallengeable superiority of the Islamic world over the infidel West.

The end of World War I signified the end of the Ottoman Empire. In 1920 the League of Nations gave Britain the mandatory power over Palestine, France over Syria and Lebanon, and endorsed the Balfour Declaration, in which the British declared support of "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." Following World War II (WWII), the major powers in the Middle East were Britain and the Soviet Union. However, by 1947 the British decided to leave the area as Palestine was seen to be too much of an economic and strategic liability. Decades of wars and conflict followed.

The first wave of Muslim immigrants into modern Europe was predominantly composed of labourers from North Africa, Turkey and Indo-Pakistan. During the reconstruction following WWII, Britain and France turned towards their former colonies in South Asia and North Africa to fill labour shortages, while Germany invited Turkish 'Gastarbeiter' to help sustain the "Wirtschaftswunder." This means that there is a shared memory of the colonial past on both sides, which is based on inequality – dominant and dominated.[6] Today, of the 12.5 million Muslims in Europe, 5 million live in France[7], 3.2 million in Germany, and 2 million in Britain.

Muslim identity in Europe and the emergence of a 'Euro Islam'

While Muslims in Europe share a common religious belief, they do not form a unified community because of the variety in their countries of origin, generational differences, variations in religious practice and political affiliation. The climate of religious indifference in some European countries has had an effect especially on young citizens of Muslim origin. Many second- and third-generation Muslims born into secular European societies are re-examining their identity and their religious beliefs. They are creating a new form of Islam, one more reflective of their adopted homelands. Conservative interpretations of Islam are increasingly challenged by 'western' values of tolerance, democracy and civil liberties.

This development has provoked important debates within Muslim communities and among Muslim scholars ('ulama'). Consulted on matters

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[6] Jocelyn Cesari, European Islam – A Profile, Islam in Europe and the United States, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC.

[7] A specific accounting of the Muslim population is not possible, as religious identity, by law, cannot be employed in French census data or government documents.

such as Islamic law and jurisprudence, they were compelled to re-evaluate their own postulate among new legal opinions, which were adapted to the western way of life. Young European Muslims ask themselves whether Europe should be considered (according to the ulama of the IX century) as a dar al-harb (an abode of war), rather than a dar al-Islam (a place where Muslims are a majority and live in security and according to the law).

A group of young ulama living in Europe decided that Europe can no longer be considered as da al-harb because there are too many Muslims who are becoming European. They decided that Europe is now dar-ul-Ahd – the "domain of treaty" or unity. This term implies a certain degree of social and civic responsibility and is not based on an "us" versus "them" concept. To this question Tariq Ramadan, who advocates an 'independent European Islam', answered that Europe should be seen as a Dar ash-Shahada, a "space of testimony" within which "Muslims are sent back to the essential teachings of Islam" so that they can contribute to "promoting good and equity within and through human brotherhood" by bringing the strengths of the Islamic message to their mostly non-Muslim societies. To be a Muslim in Europe ideally "means to interact with the whole of society."[8]

Tariq Ramadan offers a "third way" of integrating Muslims into European society, breaking down the "us versus them" mentality. The question is "how to be at the same time fully Muslim and fully Western," says Ramadan. In his book *To be a European Muslim* he writes:" Whereas one might have feared a conflict of loyalties, one cannot but note that it is in fact the reverse…Loyalty to one's faith and conscience requires firm and honest loyalty to one's country: Sharia requires honest citizenship."[9] While he advocates that Muslims integrate into and learn from European society, he also believes that Europeans must work to accept the Muslims among them. He proposes that Muslims should view western democracy as "a model respecting our principles rather than seeing it as "anti-Islamic." However, his approach has critiques arguing that nothing is offered for Muslims who choose not to practise Islam and that his idea to return to Islam's sources could lead to fundamentalism.

Ultimately, a European Islam should emerge. Professor Bassam Tibi, who coined the term Euro-Islam, insists that the integration of Europe's Muslims depends on the adoption of a form of Islam that embraces Western political values, such as pluralism, tolerance, the separation of church and state and democratic civil society. "There is no middle way between Euro-Islam and a 'ghettoization' of Muslim minorities."[10] He further writes that "within Europe, we need to share with immigrants a

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[8] Tariq Ramadan, To be a European Muslim, The Islamic Foundation, 1998
[9] Tariq Ramadan, To be a European Muslim, The Islamic Foundation, 1998
[10] Time Europe, Islam in Europe: A Changing Faith, January 22, 2003.

defining culture that is based on a value consensus; outside Europe, we need an international morality. In the first case, the value consensus must be European; in the second, it must be supra-cultural…In the context of religious tolerance, there can be no place in Europe for "Shari'a" (Islamic religious law)." [11] In order to find a consensus and to co-exist peacefully in a multicultural society, differences will need to be recognised and discussed openly.

The European Muslim world is living through a process of extremely rapid transformation. It will be of strategic interest to see how the process of restructuring of Muslim communities continues, where they are no longer ethnic communities arriving from somewhere else. With the generational passage they are loosing at least in part the ethnic characterisation and identification with their countries of origin, but are not yet autochthonous communities.[12]

However, there are developments, which have raised certain concerns in Europe. A survey published by *Le Monde* in October 2002 showed that the religious faith of Europe's Muslims is strengthening as many immigrants turn to religion for support. This tendency towards religiosity could take on negative connotations if linked to a rise of extremist movements. The foreign policy context post 9/11 provided a fertile background for groups such as Hizb ut-Tahir and al-Muhajiroun, to try and define the political agenda and to say e.g. that if you are a real Muslim, then you should be engaged in the global jihad.[13] Even though a minority, these groups project a negative image of Islam and have caused great damage to Muslim communities.

European Muslims in the public sphere

Many Muslim immigrants are struggling to become fuller partners in European society. These challenges confront large groups of Muslims of Turkish descent in Germany, North Africans in France and Pakistanis in Britain. Until now, the different Muslim communities in the European Union have not been unified nor do the Islamic religious communities have an accepted international leadership with authority to speak on their behalf. They have tended to focus on local rather than national or European problems.

An important factor why Muslim citizens have not been more effective in exercising influence in the public sphere is the weak socio-economic

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[11] Bassam Tibi, A Plea for a Reform of Islam, in The End of Tolerance?
[12] Stefano Allievi, Multiculturalism in Europe, Muslims in Europe, post 9/11.
[13] Jorgen Nielsen, Professor at the University of Birmingham, speech given at St Antony's-Princeton Conference on 'Muslims in Europe post 9/11'. www.sant.oc.ac.uk/princeton/pap_nielsen2.shtml.

situation of a majority of Muslims in Europe. European Muslim communities mostly consist of labourers with only a small elite. The question arises of what can be expected in terms of leadership from Muslim minority groups, as Muslim groups are not seen as equal political actors. A further difficulty is the question of representation. There often is a disparity between the people who have the legitimacy towards the government of European countries and those who have the legitimacy towards the people of Muslim communities in those countries. A major issue for policy makers on the EU side is that they often do not know who their counterparts are when dealing with the Muslim community. There is sometimes a lack of confessionally representative organisations, which can act and speak on behalf of their communities.

However, Muslims are beginning to operate as a more cohesive force in Europe. The local and federal organizational capacity of European Muslims is significant. There are increasing numbers of Muslim umbrella organizations that interact with local and national authorities. This has partly resulted out of a need for European governments to have legitimate interlocutors in the Muslim communities in order to address issues effectively.

Muslim political representation throughout the EU is small. The Netherlands has seven Muslim MP's (with a Muslim population of 800,000), Britain has four Muslims in the House of Lords and three in the House of Commons, while France has none. However, participation of British Muslims in local politics has greatly expanded. In 1996, 160 Muslim local councillors were elected, and this expanded to 217 by 2001. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was formed in May 1996, and by May 2001, the Secretary General of the MCB, Yousuf Bhailok, was able to claim that it was 'the largest umbrella organization of Muslims' and that its status as a representative body was recognized by all top mainstream politicians. By the mid-1990s, there were at least 839 mosques and a further 950 Muslim organizations in the UK. [14]

The role of the mosque

A further concern is that the countries of origin still seek to exert exclusive control over the major Muslim institutions in Europe, through e.g. the financing of major mosques in Europe. Every year Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco and Turkey send delegations of Muslim scholars to Europe. They often deliver a very traditional teaching that does not reflect the realities of life in European countries. For some years Riyadh has offered more and more free training courses in Saudi Arabia: the first students to benefit from this assistance came back to Europe and have since been championing quite a sectarian mode of living. Promoting a literal reading

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[14] Humayun Ansari, Muslims in Britain, Minority Rights Group International.

of the holy texts, they reject integration as citizens, are opposed to involvement in the host societies, and most often look on Europe as a world naturally hostile to Islam from which one must stand apart in every aspect.[15]

There are some groups, e.g. the Tablighis and the Sallafis, who promote the view that Muslims in Europe should not become involved in politics. They are told that their concern is how to remain Muslim. Other groups accept that they are under the supervision of their community of origin and do not want to promote independence that could cut them off from their home countries. As a result of social alienation, many Muslims see their mosque not only as a place of worship but also as a place to meet and discuss social and political issues. There is great concern as to what messages religious leaders convey in European mosques, because of mosques that were involved in terrorist acts and that convey radical messages to their followers. This is, however, the exception and there is a danger that these incidents lead to the equating of a militant minority with that of the entire community. There are signs that this trend is changing, as second and third generation Muslims have fewer ties with their countries of origin and an increasing number of Muslim organizations accept financial assistance from Muslim governments but without any conditions.

State religion relations

One of the main issues of conservative Islam in Europe is that the Koran, which is the word of God, does not handle spiritual matters only as the Bible, but actually is a Constitution for running the day-to-day life of a Muslim. Therefore, the separation of state and religion is almost impossible and is a serious issue facing many Muslims living in Europe. European politicians have repeatedly emphasized the need to adjust Islam to the legal and social parameters of their respective societies. This implies that Muslims in their respective countries should organize themselves according to prevailing church models.[16] On this point Bassam Tibi advocates the French system, where there is a full separation between state and religion and where religion is almost completely left to the private sphere. He rejects the German system of cooperation between state and recognised religious groups because Islam is unfit to be organized like a Christian church.

Muslims in Europe are not organized on the basis of a universal Islam and are therefore not yet able to seriously negotiate with the EU or European governments. An internal dialogue among Muslims is necessary to form

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[15] Tariq Ramdan, Home Countries or Host Countries in Control - Who speaks for Europe's Muslims, http://www.tariq-ramadan.org/document.asp?d=34&fichier=HomeCountries

[16] Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, European response to the Muslim Presence, Luso-American Foundation.

clear views on difficult issues and to present these to the governments of European countries and to the EU. The Austrian government took a first step towards the development of an inter-Islamic dialogue. It organized a meeting of imams to foster coordination among imams in Europe and to help articulate their views in a European direction.

There is also the problem of not providing the Muslim community with the same rights for Muslim religious practices as has been done for Judaism and Christianity. For example the wearing of the hijab (veil) by Arab women is seen differently to Jews wearing the yarmulke.

The younger generation of Muslims seems to want to play a more active role at both national and European level. In many cases young Muslims do not want to abandon Islam altogether nor do they want to be marginalized. They hope to give legitimacy to the presence of Islam in the public sphere.

Attitudes towards Muslims in Europe and the limits of tolerance

For a long time, the presence of Muslims was rather discreet and there was no awareness that Islam had any relevance to what was happening in western societies. Nowadays, while seeking integration in society, the Muslim community wishes to retain its bond with the values of its culture and religion, and thereby becomes more visible. Unfortunately, once a greater consciousness of Islam emerged, it was mostly in terms of Islam versus the West, and the relationship was often seen within a context of conflict and confrontation.[17]

When looking in greater detail at the way Europeans value diversity in their societies, a contrasting picture emerges. On the one hand, 75% of Europeans welcome the development of a multicultural society, and 86 % oppose any discrimination based on a person's race, religion and culture. On the other hand, one third of Europeans declare themselves to be quite or very racist and a majority of Europeans believe that minority groups tend to abuse the system of social benefits and that their presence is a source of insecurity. Furthermore, a majority of Europeans are convinced that the presence of minority groups increases unemployment (63%), while about the same number believe that minorities do jobs nobody else wants to do.

The impact of 9/11

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[17] John L. Esposito, Islam as a Western Phenomenon, Islam in Europe and the United States, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington.

The terrorist attacks of September 11 arguably had the greatest impact on shaping public opinion of Islam. They reinforced perceived linkages of Islam with terror and violence as well as the view of Islam as a problem for the West. As a result there has been growing distrust from non-Muslims, which triggered an intense debate on the role of Muslims in European society. Following the attacks, the European Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) implemented a reporting system on potential anti-Islamic reactions in the 15 EU Member States. The final report's findings show that Islamic communities have become targets of increased hostility since 11 September. Existing prejudices were exacerbated and fuelled acts of aggression and harassment in many European Member States.[18] In all countries a latent Islamophobia found expression in acts of physical and verbal abuse. Several reports (Austria, Germany, The Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden) hint at the fact that Muslims feel surrounded by suspicion and diffidence. Furthermore, as a result of increased attention by the media and the police, a general feeling of insecurity may be growing among minorities.[19]

The report further analysed the impact of politicians on the population's reaction towards Muslims. The report found that publicly stated attitudes of leading political figures were a factor that contributed to bringing xenophobic, racist and Islamophobic views into mainstream politics. Such statements have had a marked impact in countries like Italy and Denmark. As to the role of the media in shaping public opinion, the report showed little evidence to conclude whether the media's impact was positive or negative overall.

The sudden increase of public interest in Islam following the attacks also had some positive aspects. Sales of books about Islam increased and Islamic academics, politicians etc. were frequent guests in talk shows providing a platform for majority speaking Muslim voices. This has had a positive impact in so far as to help counter prejudices toward Muslims. The report puts forward several recommendations of initiatives for good practice such as cultural events and interfaith projects. It also recommended that the issue of asylum seekers be addressed at both the Member State and EU level along with the problem of social marginalisation and segregation. The report also urged greater interaction and cooperation between the media and Muslim organizations and the development of media awareness projects to monitor the media's representation of Muslims and Islam.

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[18] Summary Report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001 by Christopher Allen and Jorgen S. Nielsen, Vienna 2002.
[19] Anti-Islamic reactions in the EU after the terrorist acts against the USA. A collection of country reports from RAXEN, The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, November 2001.

The impact of developments in the Islamic world on European foreign policy and on Muslims in Europe

International events such as the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Salman Rushdie affair, the rise of the Taliban, and the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict have influenced perceptions of Islam in Europe. At the same time, political developments in the Arab world (Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan etc.) have impacted Muslim communities in Europe. Moreover, as second and third generation Muslims grow up as European citizens and are considered part of the electoral constituency, their concerns will increasingly be taken into consideration for electoral purposes.

Through the 1990s there has been an increasing linkage between domestic and foreign policies. It was in the context of the Kosovo crisis that for example in Britain, Tony Blair held a public high profile meeting with representatives of the Muslim community for the first time, hosted by the newly formed Muslim Council of Britain. Turkish Muslims in Germany rejected the Christian Democrats because they did not support Turkey for EU membership. However, it is difficult to estimate to what extent domestic considerations will have an impact on future foreign policy decisions of European countries.

September 11 accentuated the fact that Islam is no longer just a foreign policy issue but a domestic one. Much was said about assuring Muslims that the fight against terrorism is not a war on Islam. Regardless, through media coverage, Muslims have been inherently linked to fundamentalism and find it almost impossible to free themselves from these preconceived linkages between Islam and radicalism. On the one hand, France's policy on Iraq gave Muslims a sense of solidarity when thousands joined the mass-demonstration against the politics of the war coalition. On the other hand, prolonged conflict in Iraq and continuous conflict in the Middle East could lead to more provocations. For example, vandalism of synagogues and attacks against mosques have shown that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was brought into Europe's cities with young people expressing their social impotence by violent acts.

A re-polarization in terms of 'Islam versus the West' and a heightened emphasis on religious identity has been noted in the past years. The Salafist movement, which advocates a rigorous doctrine, has seen its influence grow among Muslim communities in Europe in recent years. However, more alarming is the Saudi effort to spread Wahabi extremist ideology throughout Europe's Muslim communities. It is therefore of utmost importance to create a strong dialogue with the Muslim communities and to address the social and economic concerns of Europe's Muslim population.

Models for Muslim citizenry

Non-Muslims in western societies are often ignorant of the difficulties Muslims experience living as minorities in a dominant culture. They are familiar with the international issues as regards the Arab world, but not with the domestic problems Muslims face. "The concern of Muslims is about assimilation and integration; about the preservation and practice of their religious faith in societies based upon Judeo-Christian or secular values, as well as about empowerment in the politics and culture of the majority society."[20]

In contrast to Muslims resident in many Western European countries, the vast majority of British Muslims are citizens, equal before the law, and with an equal voice and vote in the political arena, but even so, many of their rights and liberties, because these are selectively administered by the state, have been attenuated. A recent poll indicated that 69% of Muslims felt that 'the rest of society does not regard them as an integral part of life in Britain'.[21]

President Chirac has repeatedly spoken of a "tolerant" Islam and French Interior Minister Sarkozy stated, " there is no room for fundamentalism at the Republic's table." It appears that for the French government a model Muslim would be French-speaking, law abiding, accept total separation between church and state, attend mosques presided over by French-trained clerics who avoid politics in their sermons and would call themselves French first and Muslim second. Recently, the Dutch government has established a new seminary for the training of imams, who are expected to speak Dutch and be familiar with the Dutch anti-discrimination laws.

In April 2003 a national Islamic council was elected to act as an interlocutor with the French authorities. It is however questionable whether this will help the integration process. The Archbishop of Paris has argued that most Muslims do not go to the mosque, and that "you can't reduce the issue of North African immigration to one of Islam."[22] The elections gave a voice to traditionalists who are now challenging the government on issues such as the French government barring Muslim women from wearing the headscarves on identification photos. If disagreements continue, then the Council could present a factor against integration. It is doubtful that the attempt to 'mainstream' Muslims into

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[20] John L. Esposito, Islam as a Western Phenomenon Islam in Europe and the United States, Centre for Strategic and international Studies, Washington.
[21] Humayun Ansari, Muslims in Britain, Minority Rights Group International.
[22] The Economist, Special report: Europe's minorities, May 10 2003.

European society will help to integrate Muslim communities into European society or to curb political radicalism and terrorism.

In 2000, Germany joined the countries in which citizenship is granted according to birthplace instead of ancestry (ius solis instead of ius sanguinis). The new German law has opened the road to citizenship for all Muslims in Germany. With currently 160,000 new Muslim citizens a year, the number of Muslim voters might total 3 million in the next decade.

Political Islam is more prevalent in France than in Germany. It offers social protection within the difficult process of migration and cultural integration. Because many immigrants believe their countries of origin can no longer legitimately represent them, formal and informal Muslim organizations are essential in achieving both collective and individual recognition within the European cultural mainstream.

The American experience

Comparative studies on Muslims in Europe versus the United States prior to the events of 9/11 show that American Muslims had a greater sense of belonging to the society they live in. This can largely be attributed to the difference in socio-economic situations of Muslims in the US and Europe. European Muslims are mostly labourers who feel unable to obtain influence and respect in the society they live in, while American Muslims are mostly professionals. However, an increasing number of Americans see Islam as more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its followers, according to a survey on religion and politics, conducted by the Pew Research Centre and Pew Forum on Religion and Public life. The report found that 44% believe Islam encourages violence, up from 25 % who held that view in a 2002 poll.

Muqtedar Khan[23] wrote in a recent article that prior to 9/11, Islam was one of the fastest-growing religions in North America with groups like the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the American Muslim Alliance establishing chapters in nearly every area with a Muslim population. Today, both sources of Islam's growth – immigration and conversion – are in jeopardy, and America's Muslims continue to face hostility and prejudice. However, he highlights that the adjustment Muslims had to make to new political and social realities has had some positive impact: American Muslims have been compelled to transform themselves in order to connect more closely with mainstream American society. There are efforts under way by a group of progressive Muslims to endow chairs in Islamic studies at American Universities and in a Muslim

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[23] Muqtedar Khan is a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution and author of "American Muslims: Bridging Faith and Freedom."

community in Minnesota; fundraising has begun to support social services for the poor. Kahn writes: "Just like other ethnic groups before us, we have to pay our dues to America before we demand that it changes itself and the world for us. But America, too, must play a role. They must recognise the insecurities and fears of their Muslim neighbours and extend a hand of friendship and support."[24]

Steps at the European level

There is no doubt that the issue of Islam in Europe has moved up the European political agenda. This increased interest may be seen as an attempt to counter the considerable ignorance about Islam and Muslim traditions. At a conference on intercultural dialogue in March 2002, Romano Prodi emphasized that the European Union must make every effort to expand dialogue with its neighbouring countries, especially in the Mediterranean area, which is where the three great religions originate.[25] He set up a High Level Advisory Group on the Intercultural Dialogue in the Mediterranean Area made up of 18 high ranking academic experts, which became operational early in 2003. Its main task is to develop conditions for re-launching the cultural EuroMed dialogue. The results of the meeting will be published in a report in the autumn of 2003, along with a political declaration.[26]

Moreover, the Council of Ministers has approved the principle of the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation, the practical arrangements of which are currently being negotiated by the Member States. The Presidency Conclusions from the Euro-Mediterranean Mid-Term Meeting of Foreign Ministers in Crete in May 2003 state that:

"The Ministers also made progress towards agreement on the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the dialogue of cultures and civilisations. They agreed on its goals, objectives, activities and establishment. They agreed to take into account the input of the High Level Group set up by the President of the Commission, to establish the Foundation."[27]

Two European Parliament resolutions draw attention to the need to improve mutual comprehension between the European Union and the

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[24] Muathedar Kahn, Rebuilding an identity after Sept. 11, The International Herald Tribune, September 9, 2003.

[25] European Commission: Opening remarks by Romano Prodi – 'Why Dialogue is Important', conference on intercultural dialogue held in Brussels from 20 to 21 March 2002.

[26] For details see : www ;europa.eu.int/comm/commissioners/prodi/group/spirit_en.htm

[27] Source: http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/conf/cret/concl.htm

Islamic world.[28] A recent report by Poul Nyrup Rasmussen for the Party of European Socialists addresses the issue of developing cultural understanding and recognition and states that: "Cultural understanding, recognition and dialogue should be actively encouraged at European and international level. To begin with, the EU could sponsor initiatives to build up a more structured dialogue with moderate Muslim movements. In this context, the EU-Mediterranean initiative should be revitalised."[29]

The Barcelona Process

Beyond these initiatives Europe also needs to be thinking more systematically about its own strategic relationship to the Islamic Arab world. The South and East Mediterranean and the Middle East are an area of essential importance to the European Union. The EU's proximity policy towards the Mediterranean region is governed by the global and comprehensive Euro-Mediterranean Partnership launched at the 1995 Barcelona Conference between the EU and its 12 Mediterranean Partners. The main principles of the Barcelona Declaration are to establish a common Euro-Mediterranean area of peace and stability based on fundamental principles, including respect for human rights and democracy. The ambition of this partnership is to speed up the economic development and democratisation of political and economic institutions in the region, which ideally would result in political stability and limit the flow of immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. The Barcelona process has been widely criticised for not achieving the goals set out in the Declaration. However, the EU is taking new initiatives to reinvigorate this process. Additionally, the EU has recently proposed a neighbourhood strategy, setting out a new framework for relations with neighbouring countries, including those of the Southern Mediterranean countries, who do not have the perspective of membership.

The Arab-Israeli conflict

Moreover, the Middle East peace process is a political priority for Europe's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). As a member of the 'quartet,' Europe has been an active sponsor of the 'road map' and has allocated considerable resources to making Arab-Israeli peace a reality. However, recent developments have stalled the peace process and few give the road map a chance for survival. The Middle East conflict is a main factor of radicalisation of politics in Muslim countries and, as mentioned before, has also impacted Muslim communities in Europe. The EU is the

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[28] See: DOC.EN/RR/338/338209 Explanatory Statement Fundamentalism: A Challenge to the European Legal Order Rapporteur Arie Oostlander. Also Report on Islam and European Day Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media Rapporteur Abdel Kader Mohamed Ali DOC EN/RR352/352418.
[29] A report for the Party of European Socialists by Poul Nyrop Rasmussen, Europe and a New Global Order, Bridging the Global Divides.

largest donor of non-military assistance to the region. Since the launch of the Middle East Peace Process in 1991, the EU has given to the Palestinian Administration the largest amount of economic aid among the international players. Between November 2000 and December 2002 the EU granted nearly euro 250m to keep the Palestinian administration alive and to sustain the most basic of public services. In 2003, the Community will provide a € 132 million support package for Palestinian institutional reform and respond to the deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation. However, Europe lacks the political clout to have a real impact on the peace process in the Middle East. Europe's failure to take a stronger stance on the Middle East is part of its weakness in forging an effective common foreign and security policy. While Europe's Muslims have had some impact in shaping EU policy in this regard, the EU's policy has largely been determined by long-term security factors.

The question of Turkey's EU membership

The Turkish request for EU membership is also sparking a debate on Islam in Europe. Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan stated during a recent visit to Germany that Turkey was "irrevocably" committed to Europe and had not only "signed up to Western values" but was also turning them into reality. In a speech at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a centre-left think tank in Berlin, he rejected suggestions by opponents of Turkey's EU membership bid that Ankara was not culturally suited to mainland Europe. He stated that the European Union was not "a Christian club" but a "political community of shared values." A Turkey integrated into the EU would play an essential role in preventing political and cultural division and make a significant contribution to peace, stability and security in Europe."

The prospect of Turkish membership has raised questions on whether a country with a Muslim majority could become part of a 'European identity.' This is also reflected in the debate on whether a reference to God and to Christian values should be included in the European Constitution. However, it is unlikely that this will be achieved as most countries, aware of their growing Muslim communities, favour a form of words referring to universal values. With regard to Turkey's accession, a reference to Christian or Judaic-Christian tradition would seem to *de facto* exclude a predominantly Muslim country from Europe. Turkey's admission to the EU could serve as a role model for the Muslim world. While Turkey has recently stepped up its efforts to reform its political system and human rights practices, it still has a long way to go toward meeting the full EU accession requirements. In any event, however, the accession of a number of new member states in south eastern Europe in the years ahead will bring some predominantly Muslims countries fully into the Union.

Conclusion

In the coming years, Europe will have to rethink its attitudes toward Islam and how it deals with its Muslim population, if it is to become a genuinely multi-cultural society. It will have to address the social and economic situation of Muslims in Europe as well as sensitive points in the inter-cultural dialogue. For example, the perceived lack of balance in religious rights that does not give the Muslim community the same rights as for Judaism and Christianity must be tackled. Another issue, which caused a wide debate in Germany and France, concerns the right of female Muslim teachers and pupils to wear her hijab (headscarf) in the classroom. To provide Muslims with the opportunity to achieve active membership of the wider community to which they belong, cooperation should extend to areas of mutual interest outside religious issues, such as environmental, educational, and public health issues, the economy and participation in politics.

The creation of a dialogue with the Muslim community in the EU is a complex task. In order for Muslims to organise themselves effectively, an inter-Islamic dialogue needs to be established to address issues concerning the different organizational structures, cultures and countries of origin. Furthermore, the subject of Islam und Muslims cannot only be dealt with in a national context. European institutions will have to provide a meaningful framework for dialogue. Groups, such as the Federation of European Muslim Youth Organizations based in Brussels, are starting to realize that many issues will need to be dealt with at an inherently trans-national level.

Felice Dassetto and Jorgen Nielsen explain the present and coming challenges to be met as follows:

"The future of European Islam remains largely an open issue. It represents a real intellectual challenge for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, who must come face to face with one another and integrate the new otherness. It also entails a social challenge, because the capacity of our societies to implement new instruments of dialogue and communication will come into play. Be that as it may, this process of co-inclusion between Islam and the West will be a long one [30]."

Mirjam Dittrich, Policy Analyst, The European Policy Centre.

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[30] Dassetto and Nielsen, in <u>Convergences musulmanes</u>, Academia-Bruylant, 2001.

Appendix I

Estimates of the number of Muslims in Europe[31]

There are no precise figures of Muslims living in Europe today, since there is no central registration of residents by religion in most countries. These statistics are based on estimates of the number of migrants from countries where Islam is the most important religion.

Country	Total population	Muslims
Austria	8,102,600	300,000
Belgium	10,192,240	370,000
Denmark	5,330,020	150,000
France	56,000,000	4,000,000 - 5,000,000
Germany	82,000,000	3,040,000
Greece	10,000,000	370,000
Italy	56,778,031	700,000
Portugal	9,853,000	30,000 - 38,000
Spain	40,202,160	300,000 - 400,000
UK	55,000,000	1,406,000
Sweden	8,876,611	250,000 - 300,000
The Netherlands	15,760,225	695,600

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[31] These figures are taken from 'Muslims in Europe: The State of Research' by Frank J. Buijs and Jan Rath, prepared for the Russel Sage Foundation, New York City, October 2002.