

Editorial

Challenges facing humanity are in a constant cycle of change. One challenge, which threatens human development and peaceful coexistence, has nevertheless always existed: fear of the “other”. This fear intensified with the 9/11 attacks, subsequently resulting with the “other” being identified as “Muslims” or “Islam”. With the ‘War on Terrorism’, the confused general public began to link terrorism with Islam perhaps built on the fact that al Qaeda identifies itself as an ‘Islamic’ body. This identification only intensifies the public confusion; terrorism and extremism are not linked to any religion or ideology, but terrorists like to find their safeguard in religion. Another misconception is the popular assumption that September 11th marks the start of “Islamophobia.” In fact, as argued by Edward Said in his *Covering Islam*, it is apparent that a fear of Islam has always been present in the West.

There is no doubt that the rise of extremism in many parts of the Muslim World has deepened the West’s fear of Islam. However, it is tensions within Europe between Muslim minorities and others that intensify these fears. Issues such as security, illegal migration, and social cohesion are major concerns for Europe. Muslim communities themselves have also contributed to this fear by resorting to violence in more than one case.

The recent cartoons’ controversy, however, sheds some light on the other side of the problem. There still exists a level of misunderstanding of, and/or disrespect to Islam as a religion. The fact was made obvious not only by publishing the cartoons, but by the policy of non-apology that Denmark has adopted. This experience has shown that while the Muslim public has resorted mostly to non-violent methods of boycotting Danish products, with the exception of a few violent attacks on embassies, Danish and European diplomacy failed in containing the crisis.

With the belief that peaceful coexistence and human progress will necessitate understanding and respect of cultural differences, this issue of ConflictINFOCUS highlights the rise of Islamophobia in the West and its effect on conflict prevention approaches. Articles in this issue also shed light on possible counter policies, and containment of “west-phobia” in the Muslim world. In the International development section, Aliboni elaborates on major advances in the EU on countering Islamophobia.

Starting with this issue of ConflictINFOCUS, interviews with key experts will be presented for our readers. This issue hosts Dr. Azzam Tamimi, Director of the Institute of Islamic Political Thought, who shares his insights on Islamophobia in the European context in general and UK in particular. The Forum hosts two articles by Turkish Ambassador Omar Orhun and Mr. Ali Alfoneh. From the Turkish Muslim perspective, Ambassador Orhun highlights the origins of Islamophobia and possible containment policies. From the European perspective, Mr. Ali Alfoneh reviews the social context of Muslim minorities in Denmark and their cultural dilemma. His article provides an inside view of Denmark’s society. ■

IN THIS ISSUE

01 Editorial

**International
Developments and
Conflict Prevention:**

02 The EU, Islamophobia and Immigration Roberto Aliboni

Tête-à-tête:

05 An Interview with Dr. Azzam Tamimi

The Forum:

08 The Nexus between Islamophobia and Conflict Prevention in the Middle East Ömür Orhun

11 On Belonging - A View from Copenhagen Ali Alfoneh

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THE EU, ISLAMOPHOBIA AND IMMIGRATION

Roberto Aliboni*

Islamophobia is part of a wider spectrum of feelings whereby citizens in a country cannot bear people coming from abroad, i.e. xenophobia. This ancient Greek word attests to the fact that the question is not a new one. According to the concept of xenophobia, guests' are sacred and under the protection of their hosts. Their status, though, is the benevolent version of a captive, with striking similarities to that of a hostage. They are submitted to the household's authority, up to the point of being temporarily adopted. If foreigners are relatively numerous, stay indefinitely, and constitute a group which behaves according to different customs and moral codes, things become more complicated. Despite the foreigners being 'in tune' with national law, the situation can give way to xenophobia on the part of citizens. As of today, this picture is less evident in our large and complex societies, though the situation remains unchanged.

On another level, xenophobia is but one utterance of a more diffused hostility towards "diversity". In this sense, it belongs to the larger family of questions that include not only ethnic and religious divisions, but also tensions regarding distinctions such as gender or sexuality, for example hostility towards homosexuals. By the same token, it concerns not only evident differences but also imagined or invented ones like race. In this regard, the question includes a long-standing European scourge: anti-Semitism towards the Jews.

Modernity is predicated on equality, tolerance and non-discrimination; thus xenophobia is inherently foreign to it. But people are not born modern and well educated. Furthermore, reality does not necessarily abide by rationality. Even in Europe there is still a long way to go from the French and American revolutions and the full, conscious implementation of their principles. Those who have read the recently published novel by Andrea Levy,⁽¹⁾ telling the story of strong discrimination towards immigrated people in London, are now aware of how much the British democracy segregates "non-white" people. The novel also highlights the inherent capabilities of the British society to manage and supersede its ingrained tendencies. In fact, by far the largest majority of people in Europe hold a rational behaviour towards foreigners. It is the circumstances of the British citizen, which influences their acceptance, or rejection of the foreigner. Vulnerable people (e.g. unemployed people) are more likely to perceive foreigners as a threat to national or communitarian resources. Conservatives, chauvinists, extreme right-wing radicals, and more generally, all the people who are the 'ideological heirs' to the 1900s

Fascism and Nazism (well analysed by the French historian Pierre Milza⁽²⁾), perceive Muslims, Jews, "reds" and "blacks", Albanians and Philippines as enemies par excellence of the "white" and "Christian" civilizations they deem to represent and protect. In contrast, on the left side of the political spectrum, attitudes are generally more open, even up to the point of producing grotesque utterances of enthusiasm towards whatever may come from the Third World. In sum, amongst other evils, the modern and rationalist Europe has to struggle with xenophobia and racism. However, one has to note that Europe does it as cleverly as it can, whereas governments of sending-countries' strongly criticize Europe for its racism and xenophobia. They are not acting at all, or only very weakly, against similar scourges as they emerge in their societies.

Most national European governments and parliaments are combating xenophobia and racism. This struggle includes anti-Semitism to an important extent. The European Union is committed to that area as well. However, the struggle against racism and xenophobia remains more a national than a communitarian endeavour. EU governments have laid many declarations against xenophobia and racism⁽³⁾. In the documents relating to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and, more broadly speaking, the EU relations with the Arab and Muslim worlds, one can also see the declared commitment towards combating xenophobia and racism and, in particular, Islamophobia⁽⁴⁾. This engagement is not embedded in a solid and exhaustive EU legal basis, nor has it been translated into precise policies. The most important instrument stemming from EU engagement against racism and xenophobia is, for the time being, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC).

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(1) Andrea Levy, *Small Island*, Headline Book Publishing Ltd, February 2004.

(2) Pierre Milza, *L'Europe en chemise noire. Les extrêmes droites européennes de 1945 à aujourd'hui*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, 2002.

(3) "Joint Declaration on Racism and Xenophobia" by the European Parliament-EU, the Council, the member states-MSs, and the Commission on 11 June 1986; "Resolution on the fight against racism and xenophobia" by the Council and the MSs on 29 May 1990; "Joint Action concerning action to combat racism and xenophobia" adopted by the Council on 15 July 1996; the Council's resolutions at Corfou (24-25 June 1994) and Cannes (26-27 June 1995) leading to the establishment of EUMC; since then most European Councils have pointed out EU engagement to combating xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism.

(4) The commitment is, for instance, included in point 10 of the "10th Anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership Barcelona Summit Conclusions", 27-28 November 2005.

The EUMC was established by the EU Council on June 2, 1996 as the result of a number of resolutions by the European Council in cooperation with the Council of Europe. It commenced its activities in 1998 from its headquarters in Vienna. According to its own definition, the task of the EUMC is “to provide the Community [the EU] and its Member States with objective, reliable and comparable information and data on racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. This was to be done at the European level in order to help the EU and its Member States to establish measures or formulate courses of actions against racism and xenophobia”.⁽⁵⁾

The core instrument employed by EUMC is the European Information Network on Racism and Xenophobia (RAXEN). This database builds on the data collected by as many National Focal Points as EU member states. It addressed both national and EU levels. The Focal Points have the task of disseminating information as well as advising EU players about good practices and broad policy orientations with regard to immigrated people and ethnic and religious minorities.

Clearly, the challenge of xenophobia and racism stems from minorities and “diverse” people inside the EU itself, e.g. intolerance towards gypsies, Jews and homosexuals. Yet, by far the largest part of these problems stems from immigration. After the Second World War, immigration in Europe from the Third World was for many years essentially the legacy of colonisation or other historical ties. Subsequently, since the 1970s, increasing economic and demographic imbalances and, to a not negligible extent, of authoritarianism arose, accompanied by conflicts in many countries of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, South Asia, South Eastern Asia and Africa South of Sahara. The end of the Cold War has brought about new waves of immigration from Eastern Europe. While the latter has largely subsided and, with the EU enlargement, is changing its nature and relevance, immigration from Third World countries is still increasing. In such increase, Muslims have a large share.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this article, immigration almost inevitably is bound to spur xenophobia. Admittedly, though, the level of such xenophobia in Europe as of today is definitely higher than what democracies can afford without the risk of losing their cohesion and character. Furthermore, Islamophobia seems to play a distinctive role in this overall framework of xenophobia.

Immigration has brought to Europe a considerable number of people in a relatively short period of time. This development is coupled with an overall conservative cultural environment, which has definitely not facilitated integration. Moreover, while the EU has largely unified the economies of member states, a large part of it (the

so-called Schengen Group), has also given individuals the full freedom to move in their common area. Migration and related matters such as asylum are largely remaining in the hand of national legislations. As a result, while migrants can move in a relatively unrestrained way in the EU area, problems arising from migration are only very partially regulated by uniform rules and strategies. While the EU is now moving more decisively towards harmonising, if not unifying, legal rules governing migration in the framework of its “Area of Freedom, Security and Justice” (as with the Common Basic Principles adopted by the Council on 19 November 2004⁽⁶⁾), it is very clear that sufficiently uniform strategies on migration are not for tomorrow. In fact, it will be very difficult for EU member states to converge from as distant strategies as multiculturalism and assimilation towards a shared “European” strategy. Migration, or “hospitality”, today as in ancient times, proves to be a very sensitive and political issue. Reaching out to a solution with respect to all these problems will not be easy for the EU. It will take time and success is not assured.

At the beginning of the 1990s the EU and its members were neatly aware of the social and political risks migration was posing, in particular that an “overdose” of immigration might easily affect Western European social cohesion and bring about thorny challenges to European democracy. In fact, democracy per se does not exclude xenophobia, nor does it exclude other evils. On the other hand, once xenophobia has arisen it tests democracy cruelly. For this reason, at that time the prevailing thinking in the EU was that promoting economic development so as to prevent immigration from taking place would have been the most convenient thing to do. Conflict prevention was seen as the right strategy. This strategy was, in particular, an important motive for initiating the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In 1996, immediately after the inception of the Partnership, Eberhardt Rhein, a very influential director general in the EU Commission staff and one of the founding fathers of the initiative towards the Southern Mediterranean countries, epitomised the sense of the initiative by saying, “Europe wishes to see at its southern rim a group of countries that will not: be at war with each other; be destabilized by socio-political conflicts; export terrorism

(5) See <http://eumc.eu.int>.

(6) The Common Basic Principles-CBPs are guidelines to national governments and other administrations to foster migrants’ integration in EU societies. The need for greater coordination on this point was first stressed in the Hague Programme, endorsed by the European Council on 4-5 November 2004. For the implementation of the CBPs the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, see A Common Agenda for Integration Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union, Brussels, 1.9.2005, COM(2005) 389 final.

or drugs to Europe; threaten Europe's social stability by continued or even sharply increased flows of illegal immigration".⁽⁷⁾

The EU, neither in general nor within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, has been willing or able to deal effectively with migration. Consequently, immigration, legal or illegal, is bringing in precisely the serious problems of social cohesion and democratic coherence that many were expecting. Thus, the poor EU policy performance towards migration explains the rather high level of xenophobia actually prevailing in Europe today.

What has just been stated helps point out that the problem is primarily with the migrant and only to a lesser extent with the migrants' identity. In other words, xenophobia includes Islamophobia. It is more correct to say that Europeans have problems with Muslims as migrants rather than with Muslims as such.

Nevertheless, for a number of reasons it is true that Muslims may be or appear to be more problematic than other migrants. The most obvious reason stems from the link, generally speaking, made by the 'European public' between Islam and terrorism, or violence carried out in the name of Islam. While a good deal of Europeans know that terrorism and violence belong to small minority and make appropriate distinctions, ordinary people are less able to do so. There are contradictory influences. First are the vague or biased reports by the media's. Second is the effect of European Churches that are sometimes interested in appreciating Islam in a largely disaffected "Christianity," or in other times afraid of Islam's possible influence within "Christianity". Third come the prejudices of conservative and right wing parties that challenge the openness of left wing ones. To put it simply, the large majority is convinced that most migrants are not involved in terrorism but they cannot skip the obvious notion that migrants are used, inadvertently, as a cover by terrorists. They also know that there is fundamental solidarity between Muslims, based less in religion than in what religion has come to mean politically, following the failure of nationalism in their countries. The tension which exists between European-Western and Arab-Muslim countries internationally, is inevitably reflected in the relations between immigrated and indigenous people within Europe's boundaries.

Because of this external-internal interaction, relations with Muslim migrants look more difficult than relations with migrants of a different religion. This is not the only reason, however. All migrants very understandably form communities. There is, however, no doubt that the Muslim community tends to be more assertive politically than others. The Algerian thinker Jacques Derrida has vividly pointed out the dilemma of both indigenous

and immigrated communities/individuals imposed by "hospitality" in a noted work of his⁽⁸⁾. Derrida argues that the best way to host and protect a "guest" is to integrate him/her in the receiving country/culture. This course of action, however, tends to strip the guest of his/her own culture and ask him/her to renounce his/her identity. Derrida, as usual, does not provide any solution to the dilemma. Actually, the good-governance task will be to strike the right balance and steer change over time towards a satisfactory and stable state of affairs. When facing such identity-assertive communities as Muslim ones, the task is particularly difficult. If a government does not manage to balance the Muslim communities' assertiveness and national perceptions of social order and cohesion, there will be tensions and even clashes. Furthermore, it is not clear to what extent it would be convenient for European governments to recognize and deal with communities as such. The British model is very different in this respect from the French, the German and the Italian ones.

Because of further difficulties in relations between Muslim migrants and their communities with EU nationals, Islamophobia may sometimes appear more intense than the average xenophobia. In other words, while there is uneasiness between nationals and the numerous migrant communities established in Europe, the same uneasiness, perhaps more intensely, can occur with respect to Muslims and Muslim communities. However, one should not exaggerate or be misled by the emphasis imposed by international developments on otherwise ordinary tensions. As stated, Islamophobia is but a dimension of xenophobia. This is the red line. Thus, the fundamental problem is with Muslim immigrants rather than with Muslims. The EU should not overlook the fact that immigration is the real problem. The EUMC is a good instrument and the numerous declarations are welcome. Yet the EU should shift from the ideological superstructure (xenophobia, racism, etc.) to structures by setting out a comprehensive and effective common legislation on migrants' integration. Some steps in the right direction have been made within the EU Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Stronger efforts are in order, though, to establish an immigration policy effective in integrating migrants in order to seriously weaken xenophobia, racism and their derivatives. ■

(7) "Europe and the Mediterranean: A New Emerging Geographic Area?", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 1, n. 1, pp. 79-86; p. 81.

(8) Jacques Derrida, *De l'hospitalité*. A. Dufourmantelle invite Jacques Derrida à répondre, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1997.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. AZZAM TAMIMI

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1) Do you think a culture of Islamophobia exists in the West? Who or what is to be blamed for creating it?

- Islamophobia is not as widespread among the populations of the West as is sometimes claimed. Rather, there are certain interest groups, some of which happen indeed to be very influential, who capitalize on the state of confusion in the minds of the public in the West about Islam. This state of confusion is not only the main result of ignorance and historically inherited prejudices, but also because of Middle Eastern politics and the misbehaviour of some Muslims.

Some politicians have an interest in pointing a finger at Islam and its Muslim followers so as to justify their failure or the failure of their policies. There are pressure groups that portray Islam as the enemy and Muslims as a potential fifth column. These pressure groups are invariably linked to the Zionist project, which today is threatened by a new wave of resistance that derives inspiration from Islam and ideology from its creed. These pro-Israel lobbies have been able to successfully mobilize other pressure groups that are opposed to Islam and Muslims on religious, ethical or cultural foundations. The latter include the homosexual lobby, the feminists, some animal rights defenders and Christian fundamentalists. Finally, there are pockets of racism represented most manifestly by the neo-Nazis such as the British National Party in Britain who have found in the Muslims the new 'Jews' of Europe.

2) Is Islamophobia the result of a lack of understanding of the religion and its people?

- It is not just a question of lacking understanding about Islam and its people. It is a lot more complex than this. It has very much to do with the Westerners' approach to religion as a whole. Europe has, after having gone through centuries of internal turmoil, arrived at a compromise that confines religion to the private sphere. This process of 'secularization' has eventually led to a type of religiosity that is tolerated because it has no say in public matters. Islam stands in contrast to today's European Christianity and therefore it seems to challenge the core assumptions

about Western notions of religion. Muslims, generally, cannot keep their faith away from the public sphere; even when an individual practices what is in Islam a very private religious ritual or practice, it does have a bearing on his or her appearance or conduct or choices in the public sphere. When the majority of the French people support the ban on the headscarf for Muslim girls at schools they do this in order to preserve what they believe is their greatest achievement of downgrading the power of religion. When a cartoonist publishes caricatures of Prophet Muhammad in Denmark, the public is outraged that the Muslims take issue with this; the Christians of Europe consider sacrilege of the sacred an accomplishment of the modernity, which to them was their passage out of the darkness of the Middle Ages. So, without having to elaborate any further the idea here is that Islamophobia feeds on the modernist conception of religion rather than just misunderstanding what Islam stands for. Those who have a better understanding of Islam, or are willing to give themselves a chance to understand it better, do not just become immune against Islamophobia, they become Muslims. That explains why Islam today is the fastest growing religion in the Western hemisphere. The debate about Islam, including the 11 September, 11 March or 7 July attacks, is motivating an increasing number of people to study Islam; I would say that a majority of these people become Muslim.

3) Do you believe that there is generally a distorted portrayal of Islam? For example, many in the West portray Hijab as a sign of oppression.

- Indeed. When the Western media cover events pertaining to Islam and the Muslims the pictures presented are never without a dose, sometimes heavy and sometimes mild, of a combination of distortion, demonisation and ridicule. When it comes to Islam and Muslim issues, the media are always economic on the truth; the experts interviewed are seldom without an agenda; even those who may not have an agenda are simply not experts at all. When a real expert is hosted, believe me, we celebrate the occasion. The media generally do not have time for facts; their job is not to educate but rather to shock, thrill and entertain. When the BBC and Channel 4 in the UK have a good documentary, it is usually shown close to mid-night. The British media by the way are excellent compared to the media in America. Schools, on the other hand, do not teach much about Islam or for that matter any other religion. So, when, for instance, it is mentioned somewhere that Islam

permits a man to inherit twice what his sister inherits this goes without explanation, without context and even without reminding the public that until now women do not inherit in much of the Christian world. When the headscarf was raised as an issue it was related either to women rights to be free from oppression or to the use of the scarf as a political symbol of protest. Of course neither of these is correct; our sisters have set up an organization called 'Pro-Hijab' to educate the public, and the media in particular, that this is a requirement of religion and that when a woman observes it she does so willingly and out of the desire to please her Lord rather than her folks. However, abuse and ignorance on the part of many Muslims nowadays do not help the cause of the defenders of Islam.

4) **Some people would argue that Muslims are partly responsible for the biased image of Muslims in media. In response to this view, what can Muslims themselves do to counter this misinformed portrayal of Islam and Muslims in western media?**

- Indeed. We cannot absolve the Muslims from responsibility. The behaviour of some Muslims is despicable and it provides ammunition for those who want to shoot at Islam. Take for instance some of the self-claimed clerics who until recently took refuge in the European capitals in order to spread hatred and incite a cultural conflict. While I do recognize that some of them are products of unwholesome conditions in the countries they came from, their rhetoric has been most detrimental. The other problem we have is the confusion of many Muslims between their inherited local cultures and Islamic values. There are un-Islamic, or non-Islamic practices, that routinely are presented as Islamic. Take for instance female circumcision which is insisted upon by certain communities in the Nile Valley; they do so under the illusion that this is something which Islam demands. Far from it! Take also the problem of forced marriages especially among Muslims from the Asian community. In many instances these marriages are arranged for financial reasons or to provide a family member with a favour like getting them to Britain, etc. In Islam a woman cannot be forced into marriage and must have the final say as to whether she would like to accept an offer of marriage from a certain individual. Additionally, much of the distortion by Muslims of Islam comes from the Muslim countries themselves and especially from governments who adopt policies that violate basic human rights, deny people their civil liberties and justify injustice in the name of culture or religion. The extravagance of rich Muslims who arrive in Western capitals with an arrogant attitude believing that with their money they can buy everything, has been a major source of material for the media and the cinema industry.

5) **Isn't the reverse also true that there is a degree of Westernophobia in the Middle East? Europeans and North Americans are generally viewed in the Middle East with mistrust and labeled as 'white imperialists'.**

- Naturally, the current climate of tension between the world of Islam and what we refer to as the Western world has resulted in a lot of mistrust and prejudice. Western support for Israel has over the years been a main precipitant of these sentiments in the Muslim world. Though, one must not forget that colonial Europe left the Muslim world in a mess and as part of the history of our own world we cannot but blame the colonial powers of the 19th and early 20th century for much of what we face today. The events of 9/11 have taken all of this into new heights because many Muslims today perceive the U.S. declared war on terrorism as nothing but a war on Islam. Such perception would have remained marginal had it not been for the invasion of Iraq which only vindicated those who accused the United States and Britain of fighting Islam.

6) **In his New Criterion speech (Vol 24, January 2006) on the problem of demography and multiculturalism in Western Europe, Mark Steyn highlighted the demographic dimension of Islamophobia by suggesting that "If a population 'at odds with the modern world' is the fastest-breeding group on the planet how safe a bet is the survival of the 'modern world'?" How do you respond to such a claim?**

- I would have to listen to the whole speech to be able to comment confidently. But this statement, as it is - though it may be out of context, clearly reflects racist views. If I understand the quote correctly it seems to refer to the Muslims as being "at odds with the modern world"; and this is not true at all. Many of the issues the Muslims raise are of a purely political nature and are to do with the foreign policy of the Western nations. Islam is demonized today, mostly, because of Palestine and Iraq. Al Qaeda has been the outcome of turmoil that is to a high degree the creation of the U.S. and its allies. The Muslims who live in the West have, mostly, been law-abiding, observing good citizenry in exchange for the promises of liberal democracy: respect for individual human rights, protection of minorities, the rule of the law, equality before the law, etc. But now, and allegedly because of the war on terrorism, the Muslims are told they have to expect the worst. Additionally, there are people in the West who are seeking to do with the Muslims what they did with the Jews of 18th and 19th century Europe, namely force them to assimilate or disappear from the face of the earth. Multiculturalism, which is one of Europe's greatest achievement, is now coming

under regular assault by racists and xenophobes of all types. Multiculturalism is about recognizing the right of others to be different: to look different, to eat different things, to have different views and to lead different styles of life, naturally without the bounds of the law. The Muslims today are denied this because of the reasons I alluded to in my answers above including: failure of policy, both domestic and foreign; dwindling resources and heavily burdened social services; pro-Israel lobbies; social lobbies; and neo-Nazism.

7) In Britain, in specific, many believe that the war on terror had sparked a growth in Islamophobia and led to a more divided society in the country. How much, in your opinion, the current anti-terror laws incite racial conflicts and render the whole legal framework in Britain ineffective?

- Britain's embroilment in the war on terrorism has been very bad for Britain. It has alienated an entire generation of locally born and brought up Muslims and has increased the 'recruitability' factor for Alqaeda. At the community level, only in certain areas where pockets of racism exist have we seen heightened tension between the communities. The British public has been divided over government policy and that has mitigated the repercussions of the war on terrorism. Anti-terror laws are not welcomed by the legal profession in the UK and many of them have been rejected by Commons and more vehemently by the Lords. The anti-war movement, which has been the best alliance between the Muslims and the non-Muslim in the history of the country, has achieved a lot in terms of educating the public and acting as an eye opener. The attacks on Muslims have been very limited; I would even say they have been exaggerated. In contrast to what happened in the United States in the aftermath of 9/11, the post-July atmosphere in Britain was one in which community relations were tested but not undermined.

8) There are groups in Great Britain who claim that the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill has no substance and that it is mainly "a cynical ploy by new Labour to redress the damage done to its Muslim vote by its war in Iraq". How much do you believe this law is needed as a conflict prevention mechanism and why?

- I was one of the Muslims who voiced opposition to the Bill. I agree fully with the above quote. The Bill is actually more harmful to the Muslims because now Imams and other Muslim educators can be prosecuted for explaining a Qur'anic verse or a Hadith. The problem with the Bill is that it leaves a wide margin for interpretation of what would constitute incitement of hatred and what would not.

At the same time, the Bill does not prevent someone like Salman Rushdi from writing against the Prophet and his wives because that is not what the Bill opposes. What the Muslims were hoping for, and should struggle to achieve, is equality under the law. Our problem is that we are not treated equally. For instance, any criticism of the Jews or Judaism would be considered 'anti-Semitism' and that can lead to prosecution. There is an old 'Blasphemy' law which was designed to protect Christian faith and symbols, though frankly no body cares now anymore. It is just the Islamic faith which needs protection in exactly the same manner as other faiths are protected. The Bill does none of this.

9) Opponents of the Bill also claim that a law against religious hatred would be a major threat to freedom of expression.

- Yes, indeed, because people cannot agree on a definition. I have warned repeatedly in my comments to the media on the issue that if the Bill is passed we are likely to end up having the same problem the Australians have had since they passed their bill. Faith communities have been spying on each other, taping sermons, speeches and discussions and using them as evidence in court cases. Eventually, after lengthy trials and the expenditure of millions of dollars the cases are thrown out of court. It simply becomes a childish exercise. I would vote for no restrictions on freedom of speech unless that borders libel. Anyone should have the right to criticize the way Muslims do certain things, but no one should be protected by the law for portraying the Profit in a degrading way.

10) What do you think can be done to change things? How can Islamophobia as a "Conflict Invention" phenomenon be reconciled?

- The situation is not hopeless and a lot can, and needs, to be done. Dialogue and exchange of ideas are of the essence. Like-minded people have been talking among themselves for years but those who disagree with each other have only been exchanging accusations from a distance. These are the people who need to sit and talk. Conflict prevention cannot be achieved without tracing the roots of conflict and dealing with them instead of being totally absorbed by the symptoms. Islamophobic tendencies are generated by a combination of factors that have common roots: fear and want. ■

THE NEXUS BETWEEN ISLAMOPHOBIA AND CONFLICT PREVENTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Ambassador Ömür Orhun*

In the aftermath of the Cold War, international relations and security arrangements acquired some new characteristics. Firstly, they became more dynamic. Secondly, new values, new norms and new aspirations appeared. Thirdly, pre-Cold War structures and international arrangements went through dramatic changes.

The effect of these developments was also felt in the Middle East, adding new dimensions to the existing issues. Aside from the Arab - Israeli conflict, as we all know, the Middle East is a region that faces important social, economic and political problems.

The Middle East

The new millennium is not so different from the previous ones as far as enduring conflicts are concerned. The Middle East conflict, or more appropriately, the Arab - Israeli conflict, which is one of the most persistent conflicts history has ever witnessed, has its roots in earlier times and has also tested the strategic tendencies beyond the region.

With the promising beginnings of the 1990's, hopes were raised that many of the intractable conflicts that dragged on for decades might be close to resolution. It soon became evident; however, that such hopes were mostly based on false premises, at least as far as the Middle East is concerned.

The efforts to negotiate a comprehensive and lasting peace moved slowly forward at the end of the last millennium, with changes in perspectives from optimism to pessimism and realism. However, in the end dreams for peace were once more deferred.

At the same time, one of the most negative and dangerous by-products of September 11 attacks in the USA started to surface in the West European and North American countries; manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims began to acquire growing proportions, with effects felt not only in these countries, but in the Muslim world and the Middle East as well. Thus, a new and unwelcome chapter is opened in the long history of tension between the Muslim world and the West.

Discrimination

Discrimination is the denial or rejection of some rights,

privileges or attributes to some members of a society, which other members of that society enjoy. As such, discrimination means an unfavorable treatment of some by the majority, because of their difference in race, ethnicity, religion or belief, gender, color and similar traits.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, discrimination is based on the assumption of possessing negative attributes by the discriminated. In this regard, discrimination is a potential source of conflict depending on the extent and intensity of the pressures exerted to discriminate.

Discrimination is also built around the notion of the majority being superior to or better than the supposedly inferior minority. Therefore, unless and until discrimination is eliminated, conflict will continue. In other words, the struggle against discrimination is also a struggle to prevent conflict based on discrimination.

Most states in the broader Middle Eastern and the Euro - Asian regions have multi - ethnic societies, and such societies, by definition, are prone to discriminatory tendencies. Some of these societies have been multi-ethnic for longer periods of time, whereas in some other societies, recent settlements of considerable foreign elements (for example in the form of guest workers), is a new phenomenon, which entails all the problems associated with this new experience.

In our contemporary world, racial discrimination is a criminal offence, whereas denial of certain rights or privileges to some, openly or implicitly, is not a rare case. Conflicts also arise out of such denials or rejections. In some instances, discrimination leading to conflict also evolves into violence, at times becoming unmanageable.

Violent conflicts can be countered through different strategies; collectively by a group of countries or individually by the affected country. In the latter case, efforts are needed to create or restore conditions to enable establishing stability and calm, also striving to ensure non-repetition of similar problems. If one single country does not have the capacity or willingness to challenge the issues faced, than a cooperative or collective effort would be in order. That is why the international community has designed arrangements and measures to promote stability and confidence, minimizing sources of tension and conflict.

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(1) For a legal definition of discrimination, please refer to relevant international instruments.

Islamophobia

Muslim communities in Western Europe and North America are experiencing an increasingly hostile environment towards them. This environment started to be more pronounced in the post September 11 period. It has become characterized by, suspicion and prejudice; ignorance; negative or patronizing images; discrimination (including in housing and employment prospects); stereotyping all Muslims or Islam in general as “terrorist, violent or otherwise unfit”; lack of provision, recognition and respect for Muslims in public institutions, as well as attacks, abuse, harassment and violence directed against persons perceived to be Muslim and against mosques, cemeteries and Muslim property.

This is ‘Islamophobia’, which can also be defined in short as “fear or suspicion of Islam, Muslims and matters pertaining to them.”

Islamophobia has existed for a very long time, albeit in a rather subdued form, and is deeply rooted in prejudice. However, has become a topical issue since 2001, with devastating effects not only on the lives of the Muslim communities, but also on the societies where they live. Islamophobia, whether in the shape of intolerance and discrimination, or whether in the form of violence, is a violation of human rights and is a threat to social and political cohesion.

Major international organizations have recognized that negative connotations of Islamophobia may lead to exclusion and self-exclusion of especially younger generations, with obvious negative results in terms of self-esteem and social integration. It is also acknowledged that persistent forms of Islamophobia and in particular its repercussions through the mass media represent a threat to peace, stability and democracy.

To remedy this negative and disturbing phenomenon, sound strategies and educational approaches must be developed and vigorously implemented. Increasing understanding and respect for religious diversity would be the first step to identifying and developing criteria for good practices in combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.

This phenomenon has two additional adverse consequences:

- a. It undermines efforts of integration and brings about negative trends in attempts to create an atmosphere of harmony.
- b. An even wider fault line between the Muslim and the Christian worlds is emerging.

What is needed is a positive consciousness on the

necessity of a new relationship among all peoples to attain solidarity through respect for cultural diversity. Responsible members of communities, both in the West and in the Islamic world, must have the wisdom and also the courage to work and to live together. Thereby any clash or any perception of clash among civilizations, cultures or religions can be eliminated.

There is a need for an intellectual and ethical strategy to avoid political exploitation of the issues related to discrimination, intolerance and Islamophobia.

Discrimination and intolerance against Muslims is not only a matter of discrimination against a specific religious group, but it also deeply affects international relations as well as the internal stability of Western societies. As such, it is a multifaceted question and must be addressed through a holistic approach.

In this respect, I want to underline the following points:

- The quality of life of Muslims living in Western societies must be improved. This will lead to better understanding and better integration, thus to lessening of mutual mistrust.
- Muslims should not be seen as second-class citizens; they must not be demonized, marginalized, feared or despised.
- The war on terror must not become a war on Muslims.
- It should be recognized that Muslims have the same basic needs and desires as others, these are material well-being, cultural acceptance and religious freedom, without political or social intimidation. In that vein, Muslims should not be marginalized nor attempted to be assimilated, but should be accommodated. Accommodation is the best strategy for integration.

On the other hand, I also want to stress the importance of social harmony and respect, especially respect for “the other”, whoever this other may be, search for commonalities rather than divisions and promote inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention in the Middle East has always been a difficult task. Efforts towards this end, requires long-term commitment and a sound insight of the region.

On the other hand, trust and confidence of all the parties involved is a must. This in turn necessitates that any step towards a settlement should be coupled with a strong sense of justice, which is fundamental in the regional context.

Given these requirements, for a true dialogue and mutual understanding between the West and the Moslem world, a prerequisite for the West is to play a constructive and

effective role in conflict prevention or resolution. Only through a relationship of confidence and partnership can the Western parties play such a role.

However, growing Islamophobia in the West does not help to foster trust and respect among the sides. On the contrary, it creates distrust and confrontation.

At a time when there is a growing tendency in the West to associate terror with Islam, how can one expect to create a common platform whereby we can all work cooperatively towards peace?

Islam constitutes the spiritual foundation of a very large segment of the Middle Eastern population. Therefore, demonizing Islam does not contribute to an environment conducive to peace and cooperation.

All the more, given that the main potential conflict in the Middle East is not the Arab - Israeli dispute, but the democratization and liberalization of the region in line with contemporary values and principles (incorporating Islam to this endeavor), remains both a challenge and an opportunity.

Relations between the Middle Eastern (Islamic) Countries and the West

Relations between the Middle Eastern (Islamic) countries and the West are going through a state of flux. A tide of future events and developments will determine whether this flux will lead towards intensified threat and hostility, or towards mutual understanding and accommodation. Because so much is in flux, some may advocate inaction, to wait until the future is less obscure. I believe this will be a fatal mistake. While I grant the possible emergence of unpredictable events, by perseverance and good will, progress can be achieved towards ensuring stability and mutual confidence.

Mutual Responsibility

Tension and conflicts between the Islamic world and the West is mainly due to difficulties in finding a common normative framework for understanding and interaction. In other words, whether the tension and conflicts between the Islamic world and the West are real or perceived is a matter of conjecture.

There is a mutual inclination both in some Western and in some Muslim quarters for over simplification of the other's intentions and objectives.

Therefore, finding common rules of international behavior and dialogue is a mutual responsibility for lessening the real or perceived tension. In this respect, prevention of globalization of radicalism and promotion of moderation seem to be the key for a responsible attitude.

Perceived double-standards of the West by the Muslim world are another issue which needs to be addressed. Globalization is a fact and need not be challenged on purely ideological basis. However, globalization founded on the cultural and economic hegemony of the West will definitely be a risk for a sound relationship.

How to ameliorate and decrease sources of conflict?

- Creation of a common platform on a perceptual and conceptual framework will be a first step. This would require an effective strategy and a coherent agenda.
- Recognition of the relevance and binding nature of international norms and regulations is another point that calls for acceptance.
- Promotion of dialogue, harmony and respect; not only in words but also in deeds is another must.
- Addressing issues that either directly or indirectly aggravate conflicts, like poverty, high unemployment and corruption may also help ameliorate sources of conflict.
- Distancing from radicalism, fundamentalism, violence and terror, not only by the Islamic world, but also by the West is still another panacea for reconciliation.

Dialogue

The key to change and lessening conflict is closely related to the method of dialogue, where parties have to be concerned with the form as much as with the content.

Heritage of promoting and advancing dialogue is very much in the making of the Islamic world. However, dialogue can not be pursued for the sake of dialogue, but to support constructive communication. Another must in meaningful dialogue is flexibility and leniency, because flexibility leads to mutual accommodation and leniency leads to affection.

On the other hand, dialogue should be conducted in a spirit of understanding, so that priorities proposed by one party should not be seen as instructions, or the explanations provided by the other as an attempt to repudiate commitments. ■

ON BELONGING – A VIEW FROM COPENHAGEN

Ali Alfoneh*

“They have lived in the city for many years wearing the same clothes and speaking the same language as the other inhabitants, and they feel ashamed of their origin; yet no one would mistake them for authentic North Americans. I refuse to believe that physical features are as important as is commonly thought. What distinguishes them, I think, is their furtive, restless air: they act like persons who are wearing disguises, who are afraid of a stranger’s look because it could strip them and leave them stark naked. When you talk with them, you observe that their sensibilities are like a pendulum, but a pendulum that has lost its reason and swings violently and erratically back and forth.” (Paz 1985[1950]:13)

The spiritual condition described above captures not only the Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz’s observations on Mexican youth in the United States in the 1940’s, but also a spiritual condition prevalent among youth of Middle Eastern descent in present day Denmark. Derogatorily, they are called upon by the enigmatic notion of ‘Perker’. A neology derived from a blend of the abbreviation of the largest immigrant communities in Denmark: Pakistanis (pakistanere) and Turks (tyrkere). A word with a diversity of meanings, Perker says nothing and everything about this youth community. But strangely this notion reflects both the diversity of the people it describes and what unites them as a group.

At first glance, the community of Perkera share a few common denominators, except for the hopes and aspirations of their parents, running away from the worse toward the better, sacrificing their lives for the sake of the next generation. However, when studied more closely and more gradually, one detects the factors behind their “belonging together”.

Most decisive are the psychological scars of discrimination against them by others. A type of discrimination not manifested in the shape of institutionalized state discrimination or widespread racism within the Danish society, but in the few abusive remarks commenting their physical appearances, the occasional denied access to clubs, and the public opinion, which confuses the social problems of a minority with the characteristics of the entire immigrant community (Nielsen 2004:279)⁽¹⁾. During the oversensitive years of early youth, such experiences heighten feelings of common loyalty and interests, and the youth “often tend to see themselves as a people apart from the majority” (Giddens 1993:254), to the extent that their families are concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, cities or regions. One also detects a tendency towards endogamy and - in varying degrees - voluntary apartness from the rest of the society, “in order

to keep alive their cultural distinctiveness” (Giddens 1993:254).

More surprisingly, once an insult, the term Perker has now been adopted by Middle Eastern youth communities in Denmark, as a common source of identity. They form groupings in suburban areas, but they do not attempt to vindicate the nationality of their forebears. They do not act as Iranians, Pakistanis or Turks, and seemingly do not even want to become Iranians, Pakistanis or Turks. They have lost the language, customs and beliefs of their parents, a loss leaving them defenceless in front of the questioning eyes of the public, disabling them to answer the question: “Who are you? Additionally, they apparently neither desire to belong to Denmark nor become Danish because of the perceived negligence on the part of the Danish society. A society perceived to have failed in assimilating them. The Perker community prefers to remain “different”.

The identity vacuum created because of the lack of knowledge and pride in their parental background, and the rejection (or the perceived rejection on the part of) the Danish society, has left a population of youths vulnerable to the revolutionary propaganda of extremist movements, trying to compensate the loss with a pseudo-religious identity. In their abuse of Islam, such totalitarian revolutionary movements recruit and corrupt the minds of promising youngsters with selective (mis-)readings of the Holy Koran, and mobilize them against their parents, the entire Western civilization and Middle Eastern governments. This in turn frightens the small and open Danish society facing a formidable challenge in the shape of totalitarian Islamist revolutionary movements calling for the destruction of the polity. This is not Islamophobia⁽²⁾, but a threat shared by many individual Muslims and governments in the Middle East and North Africa.

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(1) Professor Nielsen’s comprehensive study of xenophobia in the political debate in Denmark concludes that xenophobia, measured by European standards, is not more prevalent in Denmark than other countries. Professor Nielsen’s study also concluded that parallel with the heated public debates on the negative consequences of immigration: “Denmark granted asylum to a very large number of applicants. Family reunification was increasing rapidly. New arrivals were offered very high levels of social services” (Nielsen 2004:279).

(2) Islamophobia as defined by Schwartz 2005.

But such pseudo-religious identity is a disguise, like the one Paz identified among Mexican youngsters in the United States of the 1940's: "His disguise is a protection, but it also differentiates and isolates him: it both hides him and points him out" (Paz 1985[1950]:17).

The generous Danish welfare state has responded to the economic needs of Danish citizens, including citizens with Middle Eastern backgrounds. But little attention has been paid to the spiritual needs of the new citizens and their children, who share the values of the society but physically do not look Scandinavian. The main challenge is therefore to fill the identity vacuum of the youth, by constructing a positive dual identity based upon Danish patriotism and the national pride of Middle Easterners. Youngsters of Middle Eastern origin would become much better Danish citizens if they were more aware of their Iranian, Iraqi, Jordanian or Turkish background. ■

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About ConflictINFOCUS:

Conflict In Focus is a bi-monthly online bulletin designed to provide busy readers in the EMP policy community and interested general public with a concise and regular update on the current state-of-affairs of the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict in the Middle East. Conflict in Focus is compiled by RCCP/IAI, drawing on multiple sources including the resources of our software (CCP).

Conflict in Focus alerts readers to situations where, in the near future, there is a particular risk of new or significantly escalated conflict. In specific, the newsletter is divided into three sections. The first section includes accounts of and

comments on EU developments and policies during the previous two months in the field of conflict prevention.

In its second section, Conflict in Focus summarizes recent developments in a conflict analysis perspective, using our CCP model of analysis, where the overall situation in each case has significantly deteriorated.

The third and final section aims at providing experts and researchers from the Partnership with a forum for common work and collaboration. Toward this end, the newsletter will host, in each issue, two short articles, one by a European scholar and the other by a Middle Eastern one on conflict prevention in the Middle East, with the final aim of provoking a debate on such sensitive subject.



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