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European Muslim communities confronted with extremism

Report

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Summary

Islamic fundamentalism is a source of inspiration for terrorist and other violent attacks that have hit Europe and the world in the last decades. No confusion should be made between Islam as a religious faith and Islamic fundamentalism as an ideology that promotes a model of society which is not compatible with human rights values and standards of democracy: there is no clash of civilisations between Islam and the West but a clash between the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism and the ideology of democracy and human rights, which is the cradle of European states.

European Muslim communities and Council of Europe member states should work hand in hand to reduce the potential attraction that Islamic fundamentalism undeniably exerts on European Muslims. A series of concrete measures should be taken to prevent discrimination, condemn and combat Islamophobia, stamp out hate speech and ensure compliance with human rights and the rule of law in the enforcement of anti-terrorist measures while avoiding all adverse consequences for ordinary Muslims who profess their religion in a peaceful manner. At the same time, European Muslim organisations, leaders and opinion makers should condemn unequivocally terrorism and extremism and encourage Muslims to fully participate in society while accepting the secular character of the society and the institutions of the country where they live.



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A. Draft resolution

1. The attacks in Paris in 1995, New York in 2001, the subsequent spate of bombings which hit Madrid and Istanbul in 2003 and London in 2005, and the prevention of many other terrorist plots on European soil have made evident the extent and gravity of the threat of terrorism performed by people who invoke Islamic fundamentalism as a source of inspiration. In addition to the shock caused by the attacks, it has been disconcerting for many to realise that some young Muslims, who were born and brought up in Europe, had been involved in their organisation and execution.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly warns against any confusion between Islam as a faith and Islamic fundamentalism as an ideology. Islam is the second religion in Europe and a constituent component of European societies: in some Council of Europe member states, it is traditionally the religion professed by the majority of the population; in others, it is the religion of the majority of immigrants and of citizens with an immigrant background, who represent a growing proportion of the population. Islamic fundamentalism, instead, is an extremist ideology with a political agenda, which promotes a model of society which is not compatible with human rights values and standards of democracy, and which, in its worst form, calls for the use of violence to achieve its aims.
3. It is regrettable but undeniable that, at the moment, Islamic fundamentalism as an ideology has proved to have a potential of attraction for some individuals. European governments and European Muslim communities should work hand in hand, in full co-operation and synergy, to reduce this potential of attraction and prevent it from escalating into terrorism.
4. The Assembly congratulates those Muslim leaders, opinion makers and organisations who have firmly and unequivocally condemned terrorism inspired by Islamic fundamentalism as well as other extremist manifestations, such as the hate speech pronounced by some official or self-appointed Imams or other Muslim personalities. Similarly, the Assembly commends the efforts deployed by Muslim organisations to highlight the compatibility between Islam as a religion and democratic and human rights values as well as for their work with groups that are more at risk of radicalisation, such as young people and detainees.
5. In parallel to these efforts, European governments bear a special responsibility in addressing the root causes which create a fertile ground for extremism, such as poverty, discrimination and social exclusion; in ensuring full respect of the freedoms of thought, speech and religion, as laid down in the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as in contributing to a climate in which all religious faiths, or the absence of any faith, are equally respected. In this regard, Council of Europe member states should continue to be vigilant to prevent and combat the phenomenon of Islamophobia.
6. Likewise, as already recommended by the Assembly, European governments, aiming at a citizenship of inclusiveness and participation, should remedy the current limited capacity of immigrants and citizens from an immigrant background to play an active role in public and political life. In the long term, this state of affairs, which is due both to legislative and social constraints, cannot but reinforce the grievance and sense of injustice of a part of the population.
7. The Assembly welcomes the initiative taken by the governments of two member states, Spain and Turkey, to create the Alliance of Civilisations, and its endorsement by the UN Secretary-General, who designated former Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio as High Representative for the Alliance of Civilisations. The Assembly also expresses support for the activities so far undertaken in this context.
8. In light of the above, the Assembly calls on the member states of the Council of Europe to:
 - 8.1. act strongly against discrimination in all areas;
 - 8.2. condemn and combat Islamophobia;
 - 8.3. act resolutely against hate speech and all other forms of behaviour which run counter to core human rights and democratic values, even when their authors seek to justify them on religious grounds;
 - 8.4. ensure the strictest compliance with human rights and the rule of law in the enforcement of anti-terrorist measures;
 - 8.5. promote the social cohesion, integration, political and civic participation of immigrants and citizens with an immigrant background, amongst others by:
 - 8.5.1. granting lawfully residing immigrants the right to vote and to be elected, at least in local and regional elections, so as to have an impact on local government and public administration;

- 8.5.2. signing and ratifying the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144);
- 8.5.3. encouraging the participation of people with an immigrant background in political parties, trade unions and non-governmental organisations;
- 8.5.4. taking all the necessary measures to eliminate the inequality of opportunity faced by the immigrants, including inadequate education and unemployment;
- 8.6. monitor the role played by foreign states in the financing of mosques and appointment of Imams, in order to ensure that these actions are not used to promote extremist views;
- 8.7. support the establishment of courses, if possible at University level, to train Imams locally;
- 8.8. encourage a public and inclusive debate over the consequences of their foreign policy on radicalisation;
- 8.9. encourage informative projects about Islam's contribution to Western societies in order to overcome the stereotypes on Islam;
9. Furthermore, the Assembly calls on European Muslim organisations, leaders and opinion-makers to:
 - 9.1. act with a high sense of responsibility in their public statements and condemn unequivocally terrorism and extremism, being aware of their influence on Muslim communities;
 - 9.2. encourage Muslims to fully participate in society while accepting the secular character of the society and the institutions of the country where they live;
 - 9.3. promote the transmission of core European values within Muslim communities, by highlighting their compatibility with the Muslim faith;
 - 9.4. ensure the teaching of core European values also in Muslim faith schools;
 - 9.5. encourage young European Muslims to become Imams;
 - 9.6. if appropriate in co-operation with other organisations, or local or other authorities, set up projects aimed at reducing the risk of radicalisation amongst the young generation and in prisons;
 - 9.7. encourage the promotion of a fair coverage of Muslim reality and views in the media and ensure that the voice of moderate Muslims is also reported;
 - 9.8. in co-operation with appropriate media organisations, work at the elaboration of ethical guidelines for the media in the fight against Islamophobia;
 - 9.9. encourage the development of a secular intelligentsia.

B. Draft recommendation

1. Referring to its Resolution ... (2008) on European Muslim communities confronted with extremism, the Parliamentary Assembly expresses its support to the Council of Europe activities in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, which give a remarkable contribution to the mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence of different groups in European societies. In this regard, the Assembly welcomes the forthcoming publication of a Council of Europe White Paper on intercultural dialogue.
2. In addition, being aware of the global dimension of the issues at stake, the Assembly greets the recent conclusion of a memorandum of understanding between the Council of Europe and the Alliance of Civilisations and encourages further co-operation and the organisation of joint initiatives.
3. Furthermore, the Assembly recalls the activities of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), and in particular its general policy recommendation on Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims (2000).
4. In light of these considerations, the Assembly recommends the Committee of Ministers to:
 - 4.1. consider the activities in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue as a priority, and allocate appropriate resources for them so as to ensure that they are adequately performed and publicised;
 - 4.2. support and actively implement the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilisations;
 - 4.3. increase co-operation in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue with the UN and its specialised agencies, the European Union, the OSCE and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference; and
 - 4.4. invite the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to conduct specific research on the situation of Muslim communities in Europe, including examples of good practice of co-operation between Muslim organisations and the authorities in combating extremism both within Muslim communities and originating from Muslim communities.

C. Explanatory memorandum, by Mr Mota Amaral

1. Introduction

1. Islam is the second religion in Europe. In some Council of Europe member states it is traditionally the religion professed by the majority of the population; in others, it is the religion of the majority of immigrants and of citizens with an immigrant background, who represent a growing proportion of the population.

2. The attacks in Paris in 1995, New York in 2001, the subsequent spate of bombings which hit Madrid and Istanbul in 2003 and London in 2005 and the prevention of many other terrorist plots on European soil have made evident the extent and gravity of the threat of terrorism performed by people who invoke Islamic fundamentalism as a source of inspiration. These attacks also jolted Europe's public opinion: in response to the involvement, in these brutal acts, of people who were born in Europe or had lived there for a long time, the question has increasingly been raised as to whether all groups in European societies share the same core values.

3. In a sense, this question was not completely new: at the end of the 1990s a number of governments, local authorities and non-governmental organisations questioned national integration programmes for immigrants and their effectiveness. After 11 September 2001, however, this question, which was previously reserved for immigration specialists, has been brought to the forefront of public debate and is among the genuine preoccupations of many ordinary citizens, even those who are not particularly interested in politics.

4. Moreover, the terms in which the question is now posed have changed: it is no longer a problem relating to the success of the integration process for the benefit of the individual migrant and of the overall cohesion of society, but an urgent and compelling issue relating to the peaceful coexistence of different religious groups in our societies and the security of our countries. Erroneously or not, the question that many people nowadays ask themselves is whether the Muslim faith is compatible with Western values and lifestyles. At the same time, politicians increasingly ask themselves if multiculturalism has reached its limits: should the respect for diversity be unconditional? If not, where should boundaries be drawn?

5. This report is based on a motion for recommendation tabled by Mr Eörsi and others, which points out that it is not sufficient to combat terrorism using methods involving military force, the police, criminal justice, foreign policy, national security or immigration control. It argues that there is a need to address, on the one hand, the problems of alienation and discrimination and, on the other, radicalisation, which undermines the fundamental values of our society. To be effective, these policies must be developed by, or in co-operation with, the Muslim communities concerned. This report has also been enriched by an exchange of views with a number of experts of renown, which took place in June 2006.

6. It is undeniable that, in Europe, at the moment, political extremism invoking the name of Islam – and in the most serious cases terrorism – has a potential attraction for some individuals. Throughout Europe, a number of prominent Muslim leaders – and I will mention, for my country, the Mufti of the Mosque of Lisbon, Sheik Munir – organisations and intellectuals have consistently condemned terrorism and have expressed their determination to take steps to stem its potential attraction. Muslim communities are certainly the best placed to carry out this task. However, they should not be left alone: it is first of all the responsibility of governments to:

- address the root causes of extremism: discrimination, racism, lack of equal opportunities, social exclusion, low educational achievement, unemployment and alienation;
- provide an appropriate framework in which freedom of religion, of thought and speech are ensured for everyone within the limits set by the law; and
- sanction the abuse of existing rights and freedoms to promote ideologies which run counter to the values of democracy and human rights. As Article 17 of the European Convention on Human Rights states, “nothing in this Convention may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein or at their limitation to a greater extent than is provided for in the Convention”.

7. I should like to interpret the joint statement, made by many highly-respected religious authorities and intellectuals from different countries and published in some leading European newspapers on the occasion of Christmas 2007, about the respect of the right to life as a sound condemnation of terrorism, which is a clear violation of it.

8. From the outset, I would like to distinguish some concepts, which are used in the original motion and the present report:

- Islam as a faith should be distinguished from Islamic fundamentalism as an ideology (and Muslims should be distinguished from Islamic fundamentalists). Islamic fundamentalism is an ideology with a political agenda, which promotes a model of society which is not compatible with the human rights and democratic values and standards, and which, in its worst form, calls for the use of violence to achieve its aims. In fact, this has led many experts, scholars and politicians to define political Islam as the new totalitarianism or the totalitarianism of the 21st century;
- Islam should be distinguished from extremism: Islam as a religion promotes the ideals of compassion, justice and respect for the dignity of life. Extremism is not, by nature, religious, but advocates radical measures in pursuit of political goals; it can, however, rely on or exploit a religious language or message;
- extremism should be distinguished from strict religious practice: extremism has a political goal in relation to society or the state; it should not be confused with the radical way in which some individuals, whatever their faith, choose to practice their religion, without causing any harm to others or without trying to impose their beliefs on society;
- extremism should be distinguished from terrorism: not all forms of extremism advocate the use of indiscriminate violence to achieve their political goals.

2. Who are the European Muslim communities?

9. The expression “European Muslim communities” is somewhat misleading as one must be fully aware that it is not possible to talk of a single Muslim community, even within the same country: Muslims are not a homogeneous group in ethnic, cultural, political or even religious terms. There are many important differences as regards cultural and religious practices of Muslims according to the country or region of origin as well as other factors.

2.1. History

10. The settlement of Muslim immigrants in Europe started with the process of decolonisation and targeted in particular the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands. Subsequently, more Muslims reached western European countries during the more recent waves of immigration of the 1960s and 1970s, for work reasons, often upon demand of host countries eager to increase their labour force in a period of economic growth. Although their initial plan was to put money aside and then move back to their countries of origin, many decided to stay in Europe, where they settled and brought up families. In parallel to these developments, also their religious demands increased – in terms of availability of places of worship and religious education. The majority of the Muslim population currently settled in western Europe are the descendants of those immigrants. In the 1980s and 1990s, European states started to enforce more restrictive immigration policies, with the result that a smaller proportion of migrants reached Europe, either fleeing from persecution or for work reasons. At the moment, the main reason for immigration in EU countries is family reunification.

2.2. Countries of origin

11. Muslim communities from various countries of origin are concentrated in different European countries (for instance, Turks in Germany; North Africans in France; Moroccans and Turks in the Netherlands; Albanians and North Africans in Italy; Bangladeshi and Pakistani in the United Kingdom, etc.). However, even though these nationalities represent the majority in some countries, they are also present in all of them, and they often represent different immigration waves. For instance, in recent years, the United Kingdom has seen a growing number of African Muslims arriving on its territory (from Algeria and Nigeria, for instance), as opposed to Muslim communities from Asia, who have been settled in the country for a long time.

2.3. Relations between religion and state

12. European countries differ considerably when it comes to rules on the separation between state and religion and the influence that they are prepared to accord to religion in the cultural, social and political spheres. Despite these differences, however, all European societies are secular, based on the separation between state and religion. Even when there is a state religion or the head of state is also the head of the

church such as in the United Kingdom, the state aims to be neutral towards religions and to provide a framework which guarantees freedom of religion and the peaceful coexistence of believers of different faiths as well as non-believers.¹

2.4. Organisation

13. The expression “Muslim communities” is also misleading in a second meaning: it seems to refer to organised communities while this is not always the case. In a few countries, such as France, for instance, the establishment of a single structure representing Muslims has been strongly encouraged by the government, in order to act as an interlocutor for the state. However, the issue over the extent to which Muslims see themselves as represented by these bodies is a matter of continuous debate, also in consideration of the fact that the creation of these structures is not an initiative from below – the expression of a need actually felt by Muslims – but rather an imposition from above – from the state, which is keen to identify a single interlocutor. In most European countries, instead, although there might be several organisations with the aim of defending or promoting the interests of Muslims, none of them can be considered as or has the claim of being the representative organisation of the Muslim community as a whole.

3. Discrimination, perception of discrimination and Islamophobia

14. Unfortunately, in all the countries where they constitute a religious minority, Muslims have one feature in common: they are disadvantaged, because of discrimination and lack of equal opportunities. They have less well paid jobs, have a higher level of unemployment and a lower standard of education than the average of the population; they live in poorer housing, in neighbourhoods with poor services. It is even more alarming to find that this concerns not only immigrants who have just arrived in the host country but also second, and even third, generation immigrants – who are often European citizens.

15. Both the Council of Europe and the European Union devote considerable attention to the problem of discrimination affecting Muslims, respectively through the activities of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), which has now become the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. It should be mentioned that, on the particular issue of discrimination and racism against Muslims, ECRI adopted a general policy recommendation in 2000,² while the EUMC issued a comprehensive report in 2006.³

16. Since Muslim communities in western Europe stem from immigration, it is hard to say whether their disadvantaged position is in any way related to their religious faith. Since 11 September 2001, however, there has been a natural anxiety in Muslim communities about the risk of growing Islamophobia in society. In particular, some Muslim organisations have complained that the anti-terrorist measures introduced by a number of governments have led to witch-hunting and to the unjust and indiscriminate harassment of innocent people, who have been questioned or arrested just because of their religion. Similarly, there is a feeling amongst some Muslims that certain measures introduced in the field of immigration control, rather than being used to regulate migration flows, are used for preventing the entry of Muslims as such.

17. In my opinion, these accusations are exaggerated, even if, as politicians, we have to be alert and ensure that they will never become a reality. European leaders have been unanimous in condemning terrorism and have been active in setting up new instruments to help discover terrorist networks and disrupt their financial sources. At the same time, however, they have always distinguished between Islamic fundamentalists and Muslims who practice their faith in a peaceful manner. Similarly, the actions undertaken to counter terrorism have generally been consistent with the law. In Spain, for instance, as regards the attacks of March 2003, the intelligence services and the police made the necessary investigations, the suspects were brought to court, they stood a fair trial and were condemned by independent judges, with the possibility to appeal to a higher jurisdiction.

18. I agree that further efforts should be made to improve the knowledge of Islam in Europe, especially in those countries where this faith has been imported by immigrant communities. This is why the activities of the Council of Europe in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue should be encouraged and enhanced. This process of mutual understanding should imply a frank and open debate over the inaccurate or stereotyped image of Muslims in western societies. On the other hand, the debate should also tackle some practices – be they religious or cultural – which, although accepted or tolerated by Muslim communities –

1. This principle has also been recognised by the European Court of Human Rights. See, *Kokkinakis v. Greece*.

2. ECRI, General Policy Recommendation No. 5, “Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims”, 2000.

3. EUMC, “Muslims in the European Union: discrimination and Islamophobia”, 2006.

sometimes even in Europe – are and should continue to be rejected by European societies: the inequality between men and women, honour killings, polygamy, forced marriages and the harassment and discrimination against individuals according to their sexual orientation are not only unlawful in Europe but also unacceptable for the European mentality.

19. This frank and open debate should inevitably address the situation in those Muslim countries where freedom of religion is not respected and, in addition to the abovementioned practices, the death penalty, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, such as lapidation and physical mutilation, are both lawful and acceptable – which is shocking for the European mentality. This issue is of particular importance because this is the context in which Imams serving in Europe have often been brought up.

4. How can European Muslim communities contribute to preventing extremism?

20. The hearing organised in preparation for the present report highlighted very clearly the conviction among European Muslims that they – rather than the host country – should be in charge of the main aspects of their life relating to religion, such as the running of places of worship, religious education, the training of Imams, etc. Their argument is that, since these communities are integrated in the host country and know its culture and values, they can provide the best guarantees that such activities would adhere to human rights values. In contrast, the state should refrain from any interference and should merely facilitate the work of Muslim communities in this field.

21. In my opinion, a number of considerations should be taken into account to modulate this approach:

- states not only have a right but also a duty to interfere with the activities of anybody under their jurisdiction, including Muslim communities, religious leaders or individuals, where such activities do not respect the law. This of course, includes the rights and freedoms guaranteed by national constitutions, the European Convention on Human Rights and other international instruments;
- in many countries, Muslim communities are not organised – nor do they want to be – and therefore they do not have a formal structure to act as a partner or an interlocutor for the state, the local authorities, other NGOs, etc. This is a considerable difficulty in the representation of the interests of Muslim communities. On the other hand, the existence of a variety of Muslim organisations enables states to privilege as counterparts more accommodating organisations, and overlook others who might be more representative but more radical at the same time;
- states should have the right to monitor – and if they so wish limit – the political and financial influence of foreign countries in their territories, which is sometimes exercised through the financing of the building of mosques and the appointment of and support for Imams.

22. An additional interesting remark made during the hearing was that, in most cases, those who are involved in terrorist groups do not mix in ordinary Muslim circles: for instance, the speakers dispelled the common belief that mosques are often places of radicalisation by pointing out that those involved in the 2005 attacks in London used to meet each other in a gym. In their view, since radicalisation develops outside “religious” circles or venues, there was not much that Muslim communities could do to identify or stop those who were already involved in a terrorist network. There was agreement, instead, that Muslim communities could play a role in preventing the radicalisation of those who were not yet radicalised and reduce the importance of tacit support networks.⁴

23. Some possible ways for European Muslim communities to achieve this objective include:

- acting as a link between European and Muslim values;
- concentrating their actions on individuals most at risk, such as young people, people in detention, etc.;
- selecting and training Imams. This, however, poses particular problems because, within the European Muslim communities themselves, it is rare to find people who are interested in becoming Imams. It is, therefore, almost a necessity to rely on Imams from outside, who are not always familiar with the European context, are not always adequately trained and are not supervised by any Muslim religious authority in the kind of discourse that they hold;
- ensuring the transmission of European values in faith schools, where they exist;

4. This expression refers to individuals who are prepared to provide support to terrorists – such as accommodation and assistance in order to leave a country – or just not to report information which would be useful for their apprehension.

- working with the media, to elaborate ethical guidelines in the fight against Islamophobia, to encourage the promotion of a fairer coverage of Muslim reality, in Europe and outside, and to ensure that also the voice of moderate Muslims is reported;
- encouraging the development of a secular intelligentsia.

24. As regards the measures suggested during the hearing, I would add a further remark: the main way in which Muslim communities can contribute to preventing extremism is by acting with a sense of responsibility, being aware that their statements have the potential to pacify spirits but also fuel conflicts. For instance, Muslim communities are fully within their rights to be critical of their governments if they think that some policies are discriminatory towards Muslims by reason of their faith. However, depicting all counter-terrorism measures as a direct attack on Muslim communities is not only erroneous but also detrimental: by so doing, they give arguments to extremist groups and further increase divisions in society. A similar situation often arises in relation to Imams giving inflammatory or hate speeches: on some occasions, Muslim opinion leaders, rather than supporting the authorities' decision to expel the Imams in question, have attacked it as an infringement of the right to free speech. This is not responsible behaviour.

5. How can European states tackle extremism?

25. As I mentioned in the introduction, there should be synergy between states and Muslim communities in tackling extremism. States cannot escape their responsibilities in this field, for several reasons:

- the prevention of extremism should be an integral part of their anti-terrorist policies;
- the failure of economic and social policies contributes to fuelling the root causes of extremism;
- an integration policy has achieved its objective only when both immigrants and citizens share a commonality of values.

26. Council of Europe member states should, therefore:

- act strongly against discrimination in all areas, including those cases where a legal framework is in place but it is not applied properly, or sanctions are not implemented;
- aiming at an effective citizenship of inclusiveness and participation, promote the political and civic participation of immigrants and citizens with an immigrant background. In effect, many Council of Europe member states persist in refusing the full participation of immigrants in their political life. Through the opening of a convention⁵ for ratification by member states and through a plethora of Assembly texts,⁶ the Council of Europe has called on member states to grant lawfully residing immigrants the right to vote and to be elected at local and regional level. To date, only seven Council of Europe member states have granted this right, on the condition of a minimum length of lawful residence.⁷ Limited political participation is not only an issue for foreigners: many Muslims are citizens of Council of Europe member states, either because they were naturalised or because they were born in Europe to immigrant parents. And yet, so far they are not adequately represented at the political level. This is not only unfair but also dangerous for the stability of European societies, as a substantial number of individuals do not find regular channels to express their grievances and expectations. Council of Europe member states should, therefore, grant the right to vote and be elected for legally residing immigrants, at least in local and regional elections, in order to give immigrants a means to have an impact on local government and public administration. I think that, in addition to institutions, political parties and trade unions should also play a role in this field, as the participation of immigrants – or citizens of immigrant background – in their structures, in particular at the top, is very limited. The existence of barriers to Muslim citizens entering public and political life should be thoroughly looked into and addressed;
- promote active policies of intercultural and interreligious dialogue involving all entities concerned with education, youth, migration and the media;
- emphasise the crucial role of local authorities in the process of dialogue amongst and integration of different cultural and religious communities;

5. ETS No. 144, Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level.

6. Amongst them, [Recommendation 1596 \(2003\)](#) on the situation of young migrants in Europe, [Resolution 1459 \(2005\)](#) on the abolition of restrictions on the right to vote and [Resolution 1547 \(2007\)](#) on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe.

7. Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

- help Muslim communities have adequate places of worship so as to minimise the phenomenon of so-called “street mosques” where people assemble in the street to pray under the guidance of self-appointed Imams;
- support the establishment of courses – if possible at university level – to train Imams locally;
- act resolutely against hate speeches and all other forms of behaviour which run counter to human rights and democratic values, even when their authors seek to justify them on religious grounds.

27. At the same time, European states should accept the fact that their foreign policy is bound to have an effect on European Muslim communities: generally speaking, Muslims in Europe consider that European states do not have a balanced approach as regards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Middle East as a whole and that their views are not taken into consideration. This increases their feeling that Muslims worldwide suffer injustice and helps create fertile ground for radicalisation.

6. Conclusions

28. The subject of this report is of great importance to Europe’s future and its cultural and political identity. As the oldest pan-European organisation dedicated to protecting and promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights, the Council of Europe has a duty to participate in this debate – which concerns the Organisation’s core values.

29. In conclusion, I would like to highlight some fundamental issues of this debate:

- European states are founded on the principle of secularism (in French: *laïcité*). This situation is the result of a long process and of tormented political and religious struggles. It is, in fact, a great achievement that individuals are considered as citizens as opposed to followers of a certain religion or non-believers and that different religions can coexist peacefully in the same society. While it is important to discuss the situation of Muslim communities at this precise time in our history, we should be careful not to undermine the achievement of secularism and the principle of the neutrality of the state as regards religious beliefs – or the absence of religious beliefs. In this context, the recent statements by the Archbishop of Canterbury about the need to incorporate some aspects of Sharia Law in the British system in order to respond to the needs of Muslim communities are very worrying as religion would then become the fundamental feature to define the legal status of individuals before the state;
- even in the context of secular states, respect for religion and religious diversity is of paramount importance and a sign of civic and well-educated behaviour. Offending the religious beliefs of others can be perceived as harassment, discrimination or even an offence. However, reactions to such behaviour should be challenged primarily through the appropriate judicial channels; similarly reactions of indignation should respect the principle of proportionality;
- I do not accept the concept of the clash of civilisations: Islam and the West have coexisted for centuries, are compatible and based on the same universal core values. But I see a clash between the political ideology of Islamic fundamentalism and the ideology of democracy and human rights which is the cradle of European states;
- Muslim opinion leaders in Europe carry a special responsibility in preventing the spread of the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism by condemning it firmly and unequivocally: all statements which appear to minimise, condone or even justify acts of violence or terrorism perpetrated in the name of religion run counter to Europe’s consolidated humanitarian and human rights values. May I recall the position expressed by the Assembly in its [Resolution 1258 \(2001\)](#) on democracies facing terrorism that terrorism is “a crime that violates the most fundamental human right: the right to life”;
- European political leaders must acknowledge that Islamic fundamentalism is a problem and must act to counter it while fully respecting the Muslim faith and avoiding all adverse consequences on ordinary Muslims who profess their religion in a peaceful manner. Similarly, they should speak clearly and firmly against any violation of human rights, including those which their authors claim to be justified on religious grounds.

Appendix – The situation in some Council of Europe member states

Without claiming in any way to provide an exhaustive overview, I should like to provide some basic information about Muslim communities in certain Council of Europe member states.

a. Belgium

In Belgium, as in Germany, the Muslim community arrived as a result of agreements with Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey, designed to encourage immigration in order to address labour shortages. Muslims currently account for 4% of the country's population. Most are of Moroccan origin, the second largest community being the Turkish community.

The Executive of Muslims of Belgium (EMB) is the interlocutor that is officially recognised by the government in matters concerning the Muslim faith. It is responsible for religious instruction in schools, training Imams and appointing "chaplains" in hospitals and prisons. The EMB does not by any means have the universal approval of the Belgian Muslim community, and its representativeness and effectiveness have sometimes been called into question.

The Belgian state finances Imams' salaries and the upkeep of mosques. Since January 2005, the Flemish region has introduced additional conditions that mosques have to meet in order to receive public funding: for instance, they must use the Dutch language, show greater tolerance towards women and homosexuals and refrain from preaching extremist ideas.

Legislation on the acquisition of Belgian nationality is rather liberal, and many immigrants have been naturalised after being lawfully resident in the country for the requisite period of time. However, the issue of the right to vote and stand in local elections (recognised in 2004 for those who fulfil certain requirements of lawful residence) was highly controversial.

b. France

France's Muslim population numbers over 4 million, most of whom are of North African origin (1 550 000 of Algerian, 1 million of Moroccan and 350 000 of Tunisian origin). The remaining Muslims come from the Middle East, Turkey (representing more than 400 000 people), Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. There are also some 40 000 converts.

For many years now, France has been discussing the concept of secularism in relation to freedom of religious expression, which has led to widespread public and political debate on the display of religious symbols in public buildings. This originated when some Muslim girls, who covered their heads with scarves, were controversially expelled from state schools.

It was at the initiative of the government – and not of the Muslim communities themselves – that the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) was set up to act as an interface with the government. It is responsible for the appointment of "chaplains" in hospitals and prisons, the building of mosques, foundations for Islamic works, and so on. The organisations represented within the Council include the Union of Islamic Organisations of France (UOIF), the National Federation of Muslims of France (FNMF) and the Co-ordinating Committee for Turkish Muslims in France (CCMTF). As in the case of its Belgian counterpart, the French Council of the Muslim Faith sometimes comes under criticism on grounds of ineffectiveness and insufficient representative legitimacy.

c. Germany

Germany has a Muslim population of some 3.5 million, 70% of whom are of Turkish origin. Many of them came by virtue of special agreements negotiated in the 1960s to meet the shortage of local labour. Because of restrictive criteria for the acquisition of German citizenship, based on legislation in force until 2000, only 400 000 of them (including the second and third generations) have German citizenship.

There is no single official organisation representing Muslim communities in dialogue with the federal state, but there are groups that see themselves as representing Muslim interests at national level, such as the Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, the Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland and the Föderation der Aleviten Gemeinden in Deutschland, among others.

Because there is no single representative body – in contrast to other religions – Islam does not fulfil the prerequisites for certain privileges provided for in federal legislation in connection with its internal administration and financing. These matters, along with the possibility of providing religious instruction in schools and of building mosques – are dealt with by the *Länder*, not without difficulty.

Recent opinion polls reveal a deterioration in the image of Islam and Muslims in Germany. Yet the unemployment rate among second-generation Muslims – even though it is higher than the average for the population as a whole – is two to three times lower than in France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

d. Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the debate on the integration of immigrants and, in particular, the compatibility of Muslim and Dutch values – such as secularism, gender equality, acceptance of homosexuality – has likewise been going on for years and has been marked by events that have shocked public opinion, such as the murder of the film-maker Theo van Gogh in 2002. The concept of multiculturalism is being called into question more and more frequently, and anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim feeling is increasing in public opinion and political discourse.

There are some 700 000 Muslims in the Netherlands, accounting for nearly 5% of the population. The main countries of origin are Turkey and Morocco, followed by Suriname, Iraq and Somalia. The population is concentrated in the major urban centres of the Netherlands, some of which – for example, Rotterdam and Amsterdam – could become cities with a Muslim majority in the coming decades.

As is the case in Germany, there is no single organisation acting as an interface with the government. The two main Muslim organisations are the Contact Group for Muslims and Government (Contactorgaan Moslems en de Overheid, CMO), which represents some 500 000 Muslims, and the Islam Contact Group (Contact Groep Islam, CGI), representing 115 000 Muslims.

In 2003, the Netherlands introduced legislation on the training of Imams, which stipulates that they must speak the language of the country and respect its values. Since 2005, training programmes for Imams have been run at the Free University of Amsterdam.

e. United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has a Muslim population of about 1.5 million, most of whom are of Asian origin (Pakistani and Bangladeshi). There are also substantial numbers of Arabs, Kurds, Nigerians, Turks and Turkish Cypriots along with refugees from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and the Balkans. The number of converts to Islam is estimated at between 5 000 and 10 000.

There is no single organisation with an official role, even though the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is the biggest network, embracing some 380 smaller associations.

The state funds some private Muslim schools. There are over 500 registered mosques and probably as many unofficial mosques. It would seem that only 30% of the Imams practising in the country have received training in the United Kingdom.

Reporting committee: Political Affairs Committee. Reference to committee: [Doc. 10705](#) and Reference No. 3145 of 7 October 2005.

Draft resolution and draft recommendation unanimously adopted by the committee on 12 March 2008.

Members of the committee: Mr Göran **Lindblad** (Chairperson), Mr David **Wilshire** (Vice-Chairperson), Mr Björn Von Sydow (Vice-Chairperson), Mrs Kristiina **Ojuland** (Vice-Chairperson), Mrs Fátima **Aburto Baselga**, Mr Miloš **Aligrudić**, Mr Claudio **Azzolini**, Mr Denis Badré, Mr Ryszard Bender, Mr Fabio Berardi, Mr Radu Mircea **Berceanu**, Mr Andris **Bērziņš**, Mr Aleksandër **Biberaj**, Mrs Guðfinna Bjarnadóttir, Mr Giorgi Bokeria, Mr Predrag Bošković, Mr Luc **Van den Brande**, Mr Mevlüt **Çavuşoğlu**, Mr Lorenzo Cesa, Ms Elvira **Cortajarena**, Ms Anna **Čurdová**, Mr Rick **Daems**, Mr Dumitru Diacov, Mr Michel Dreyfus-Schmidt, Ms Josette **Durrieu**, Mr Frank Fahey, Mr Joan Albert Farré Santuré, Mr Pietro Fassino, Mr Per-Kristian **Foss**, Ms Doris Frommelt, Mr Jean-Charles Gardetto, Mr Charles Goerens, Mr Andreas **Gross**, Mr Davit **Harutyunyan**, Mr Joachim **Hörster**, Mrs Sinikka **Hurskainen**, Mr Tadeusz **Iwiński**, Mr Bakir Izetbegović, Mr Michael Aastrup **Jensen**, Mrs Birgen **Keleş**, Mr Victor Kolesnikov, Mr Konstantin Kosachev, Ms Darja Lavtižar-Bebler, Mr René **van der Linden**, Mr Eduard **Lintner**, Mr Dariusz **Lipiński**, Mr Younal **Loutfi**, Mr Mikhail Margelov, Mr Dick **Marty**, Mr Frano Matušić, Mr Mircea **Mereuță**, Mr Dragoljub Mićunović, Mr Jean-Claude Mignon,

Ms Nadezhda Mikhailova, Mr Aydin Mirzazada, Mr João Bosco **Mota Amaral**, Ms Natalia Narochnitskaya, Mrs Miroslava **Němcová**, Mr Zsolt Németh, Mr Fritz Neugebauer, Mr Hryhoriy **Omelchenko**, Mr Theodoros Pangalos, Mr Aristotelis Pavlidis (alternate: Mr Nikolaos **Dendias**), Mr Ivan **Popescu**, Mr Christos Pourgourides, Mr John Prescott (alternate: Mr John **Austin**), Mr Gabino **Puche**, Mr Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, Mr Andrea Rigoni, Lord Russell-Johnston (alternate: Mr Denis **MacShane**), Mr Oliver Sambevski, Mr Samad **Seyidov**, Mr Leonid **Slutsky**, Mr Rainder Steenblock, Mr Zoltán Szabó, Mr Mehmet **Tekelioğlu**, Mr Han Ten Broeke, Lord **Tomlinson**, Mr Mihai Tudose (alternate: Mrs Florentina **Toma**), Mr José Vera Jardim, Ms Biruté Vésaitė, Mr Wolfgang **Wodarg**, Ms Gisela Wurm, Mr Boris **Zala**.

Ex officio: MM. Mátyás **Eörsi**, Tiny Kox.

NB: The names of those members present at the meeting are printed in bold.

See 13th Sitting, 15 April 2008 (adoption of the draft resolution, as amended, and draft recommendation, as amended); and [Resolution 1605](#) and [Recommendation 1831](#).