



Doc. 11575

14 April 2008

European Muslim communities confronted with extremism

Committee Opinion

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population

Rapporteur: Mr Hakki KESKIN, Germany

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population welcomes the report from the Political Affairs Committee on European Muslim communities confronted with extremism.
2. The committee notes the many interesting questions raised in the report of Mr Mota Amaral and agrees with the conclusions to uphold the principle of a secular state while having respect for religion and religious diversity, and to counter Islamic fundamentalism while fully respecting the Muslim faith and avoiding all adverse consequences on ordinary Muslims who profess their religion in a peaceful manner and those who have a secular lifestyle and values but are identified as “Muslims” because of their nationality, ethnic, cultural or family background and affiliation.
3. From the migrant perspective, the committee strongly supports the argument that governments have the responsibility to address the root causes of extremism such as discrimination, racism, lack of equal opportunities, social exclusion, low educational achievement, unemployment and alienation which are experienced by many immigrant communities including Muslim communities.

B. Explanatory memorandum, by Mr Hakki Keskin

Introduction: diversity of Muslim presence in Europe

1. One of the most urgent challenges facing European societies today is the issue of peace. On the one hand, peace must be established externally with the Islamic countries in our globalised world and, on the other, peace must be established internally with Muslims who have migrated to Europe or were born in European countries and practice various forms of Islam.
2. Islam's association with Europe is very old. Muslims have lived in the Balkan and Caucasus regions, in the Iberian Peninsula, in Cyprus, Sicily and Malta for centuries. Several Council of Europe member states – namely Albania, Azerbaijan and Turkey – have a predominantly Muslim population. Islam is the second largest religion in the Russian Federation, and is the religion of many ethnic minorities.
3. Britain, France and the Netherlands had a long history of contact with the Muslim world as colonial states (for example, with Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia).
4. Many Muslims have also arrived and settled in Europe as migrants. During the economic boom of the 1960s, they first arrived as migrant workers in response to a demand for low skill industrial labour in western Europe. They were later joined by their families in the course of the 1970s and 1980s. Family reunion and settlement began to alter the demographics and the social and political dynamics of Muslim communities in



Europe. The concentration of migrant workers and their families in industrial areas meant that while the overall Muslim population in each country was relatively low, they had a very visible presence in many cities and segregated neighbourhoods.

5. In the course of the 1980s, Muslims from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, and latter in the 1990s from Yugoslavia and Somalia, arrived to northern and western Europe as refugees seeking asylum. Many of them were skilled professionals arriving from urban centres and were able to play, together with Muslim students in Europe, an important role in the process of interaction between Muslim communities and host societies.

6. More recently, since the 1990s, there has been a new wave of immigration to south European countries in response to those countries' economic development and labour needs, particularly in agriculture and tourism sectors. For example, Greece has experienced migration of predominantly Albanian Muslims, but also Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iraq. In Spain, large numbers of Muslim migrants arrive irregularly from Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa and in Italy from North Africa and Albania.

Addressing the root causes of extremism

7. Since 11 September 2001, the relationship between Islam and European society has been under strain. On the one hand, there has been significant growth in extremist movements which seek to achieve their objectives by violent means. In justifying their acts of terrorism these organisations draw on Islamic beliefs, exploiting religion for misanthropic ends.

8. On the other hand, Islam and Muslim values have been at the centre of a public debate concerning their compatibility with European values. Muslims are often portrayed in media as a devoutly religious and homogenous group sharing a fundamentalist vision of Islam. Regrettably, this stereotype image of Muslims conceals diversity in religious beliefs and practices amongst Muslim communities living in Europe which in reality vary considerably due to different national, cultural, social and religious backgrounds.

9. The notion that the presence of Islam in Europe, in the form of its Muslim citizens and migrants, is a challenge for Europe and European values and norms, has taken a strong hold in European political debates. It has created a climate of fear and a deepening religious and cultural divide.

10. Extremism is not just a phenomenon of followers of Islamic belief. Any religion knows that extremists and political extremism is one of the biggest threats in Europe.

11. The report of Mr Mota Amaral recognises the scale of the problem: whether and how Islam can be integrated into European societies became no longer a question of an integration process and overall cohesion of society but an "urgent and impellent issue relating to the peaceful coexistence of different religious groups in our societies and the security of our countries".

12. The report illustrates the various dimensions of the radicalisation process. It rightly states that discrimination, stigma and alienation of Muslim communities must be taken into account if radicalisation is to be understood. Mr Mota Amaral therefore quite rightly points out that it is the responsibility of states and society to address the root causes of extremism, and in particular: discrimination, racism, lack of equal opportunities and social exclusion.

Integration

13. The rapporteur considers that an essential component of any farsighted integration policy must be to grant equal rights in all areas of society to migrant communities living permanently in European countries.

14. While the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has in the past focused on issues of integration of migrants in general,¹ and integration of migrant women² and young migrants³ in particular, more in-depth work is needed to explore the issues fundamental to the integration of specific groups including migrants and European citizens of migrant descent who belong to Muslim faith groups.

1. The Parliamentary Assembly has devoted considerable attention to the issue of the integration of immigrants. To this regard it has adopted [Recommendation 712 \(1973\)](#) on the integration of migrant workers with the society of their host countries, [Resolution 631 \(1976\)](#) on the integration of migrants into society as regards education and cultural development, [Recommendation 1206 \(1993\)](#) on the integration of migrants and community relations, [Recommendation 1500 \(2001\)](#) on participation of immigrants and foreign residents in political life in the Council of Europe member states, [Recommendation 1625 \(2003\)](#) on policies for the integration of immigrants in Council of Europe member states, [Resolution 1437 \(2005\)](#) on migration and integration: a challenge and an opportunity for Europe.

15. It is regrettable that since 11 September 2001, the immigration debate has been dominated by questions of security and border controls, to the detriment of integration policies.

16. Such attitudes and political choices overlook the fact that millions of migrants enjoy legal residence in Council of Europe member states and want to participate fully in the life of the host country and respect its democratic rules and values.

17. If terrorism and extremism poses a threat to democracy, governments and public should also be aware that the failure to devise and implement effective integration policies for immigrants will pose an equal threat to the values which are at the heart of European society, namely equality, democratic representation and social cohesion.

Integration as a two-way process

18. The rapporteur considers that integration should be a continuous, two-way process which is based on mutual rights and corresponding obligations of both immigrants and the host society.

19. According to the study of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia,⁴ many Muslims in Europe acknowledge that they themselves need to do more to engage with wider society, to overcome the obstacles and difficulties that they face and to take greater responsibility for integration.

20. Engagement and participation need also encouragement and support from mainstream society that has to do more to accommodate diversity and remove barriers to integration. In principle, integration policies should lead to better relations between people of different backgrounds and to a decrease in racial discrimination in European societies.

21. However, as documented in country monitoring reports of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), this does not always seem to be the case. Public debate on integration seems to have shifted from a more technical debate, in which different areas of disadvantage were examined and addressed, to a more general debate on the cultures and values of different groups and, ultimately, on the inherent worth and mutual compatibility of such cultures and values.

22. At a recent seminar⁵ on “the relationship between integration and the fight against racism and racial discrimination”, the ECRI advocated to include a strong antidiscrimination focus in all integration strategies:

“In order to achieve a truly integrated society it is crucial that integration policies simultaneously address discrimination, racism and prejudice on the one hand and, on the other, any possible gaps in members of minority groups’ skills (for instance relating to language, education, professional competencies or knowledge of society) which negatively affect their ability to participate fully in society. At the same time it is necessary that the focus on combating discrimination and racism be explicitly and consistently presented to the public as forming an integral part of integration policies, so as to benefit from the political priority generally given to integration issues.”

23. For this reason, the rapporteur recalls recommendations to the member states which are outlined in the ECRI general policy recommendation on combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims ([Recommendation No. 5](#)) and on combating racism while fighting terrorism ([Recommendation No. 8](#)).

24. The rapporteur also insists on the importance of adopting anti-discrimination legislation in all member states of the Council of Europe and to devise effective mechanisms to implement it. In Germany, for example, the transposition of the EU Anti-discrimination Directive⁶ passed reluctantly, and the law still lacks effective instruments to be implemented. For example, the powers of the ombudsperson should be clearly defined and the burden of proof should not be incumbent to the individual who is discriminated against but instead shared with the discriminating party which often involves employers or public administration.

25. With regard to integration of young people, the rapporteur highlights the work carried out by the European Youth Centre concerning “Islamophobia and its consequences on young people” and the important and numerous youth activities undertaken for the campaign, “All different – All equal”.

2. Parliamentary [Resolution 1478 \(2006\)](#) on integration of immigrant women in Europe.

3. [Recommendation 1596 \(2003\)](#) on the situation of young migrants in Europe.

4. “Muslims in the European Union – Perceptions of Discrimination and Islamophobia”, EUMC 2006.

5. ECRI seminar on “The relationship between integration and the fight against racism and racial discrimination”, 28-29 February 2008, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/.

6. Council Directive 2000/43/EC on Anti-discrimination.

Conclusion: towards an inclusive multi-ethnic society?

26. Muslim presence in Europe is very diverse, reflecting different national, cultural, social and religious backgrounds. Some Council of Europe member states have a predominantly Muslim population, some have important ethnic minorities of Muslim faith, and others have settled or more recent immigrant Muslim communities which today include the European citizens of second and third generations.

27. Persons identified as “Muslims” either because of their nationality, ethnic, cultural or family background and affiliation may not define themselves as such. Research shows that most European Muslims, as is the case with other religions, have a secular lifestyle and values.

28. It is regrettable that since 11 September 2001, the relationship between Islam and European society has been under strain and that the immigration debate has been dominated by questions of security to the detriment of integration policies.

29. The rapporteur therefore urges that the member states use the guidance of the Council of Europe to take a range of positive measures to enable Muslim communities living permanently in Europe to integrate into society through fair and non-discriminatory access to employment, to education, to vocational training, to housing in mixed areas and to public services. The integration process should in time lead to democratic participation through citizenship and/or the right to vote. Investment in integration, tolerance-building and mutual understanding particularly among young people – will bring Europe closer to a peaceful future.

C. Proposed amendments to the draft resolution

While emphasising its support for the draft resolution tabled by the Political Affairs Committee, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population proposes the following amendments:

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 5, insert a new paragraph as follows:

“Moreover, Council of Europe member states should take a range of positive measures to enable migrants and citizens of migrant descent, including Muslim communities, to integrate into society through non-discriminatory access to employment, to education, to vocational training, to housing and to public services. Engagement and active participation of migrants and persons with a migrant background in society need also encouragement and support from mainstream society that has to do more to accommodate diversity and remove barriers to integration.”

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

Add a new paragraph 8.5.1 as follows:

“complying with the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and all relevant statutory and regulatory provisions of the member states”.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 8.5, delete sub-paragraph 8.5.4 and insert a new paragraph 8.5.1 as follows:

“taking a range of positive measures to enable migrants and persons with a migrant background to integrate into society through fair and non-discriminatory access to employment, to education, to vocational training, to housing in mixed areas, to public services and ultimately through democratic participation by citizenship.”

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 8.5, insert a new paragraph 8.5.2 as follows:

“developing specific activities for integration and tolerance building among young people;”.

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 8.5, insert a new paragraph 8.5.3 as follows:

“signing and ratifying the Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers (ETS No. 93);”.

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 9.3, replace the words “promote the transmission of core European values” with the following: “promote the core European values”.

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 9.3, after the words “within Muslim communities,” insert the following: “and among young people in particular,”.

D. Proposed amendment to the draft recommendation

While emphasising its support for the draft recommendation tabled by the Political Affairs Committee, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population proposes the following amendment:

Amendment H (to the draft recommendation)

After sub-paragraph 4.1, insert a new sub-paragraph 4.2 as follows:

“support and allocate appropriate resources for the activities in the field of integration of migrants and persons with a migrant background, including specific activities for integration and tolerance building among young people;”.

Reporting committee: Political Affairs Committee.

Committee for opinion: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population.

Reference to committee: Doc. 10705 and Reference No. 3145, 7 October 2005.

Opinion approved by the committee on 14 April 2008. See 13th Sitting, 15 April 2008 (adoption of the draft resolution and draft recommendation, as amended); and [Resolution 1605](#) and [Recommendation 1831](#).