

CIFE Studies: The EU in World Politics

volume 1

The EU and the Eastern Mediterranean: The Multilateral Dialogue Option

edited by George N. Tzogopoulos

with a Preface by Ambassador Nikolaus Meyer-Landrut

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How to Prevent the European Public from Conflating Islam and Muslims with Terrorism; and How to Prevent the Muslim-Origin People from Constructing Parallel Communities ...

ayhan kaya

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The answer to both questions in the title is that both EU and Turkey should work together to attain such objectives. EU–Turkey relations need to be revitalised not only to resolve multilateral issues revolving around migration, energy, security and trade, but also those issues regarding social cohesion in Europe as far as the co-existence of native communities and Muslim-origin communities. To that effect, like many other migrant-sending countries, Turkey also has a lot to offer to the EU to prevent some polarising prejudices and parallel community construction.

Conflating Muslims with Terrorism

In certain contexts in Europe, security measures to counter terrorism are perceived as disproportionately targeting Muslims, leading to stigmatisation and to the spread of stereotypes, creating diverse challenges in their everyday lives. Furthermore, there is a clear need to discourage the conflation of Islam with violent extremism. Law enforcement agencies frequently have insufficient knowledge and

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25 Prime Youth: Islamophobia, Agreement No.785934, <https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr/en/>

capacity to recognise crimes motivated by anti-Muslim hatred. This leads to systematic under-reporting and as a result an underestimation of the magnitude of hatred targeting Muslims.

As clearly stated in the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) country monitoring schemes, anti-Muslim hatred, including hate speech, and discrimination against young people of Muslim background or Muslim communities as such (including refugees arriving in Europe) contribute to exclusion and hold the risk of further reinforcing religious radicalisation of children and young people.⁴¹ While the European response to terrorist activities must be provided in a highly targeted manner by judicial, prosecution, law enforcement and security services, the endogenous root causes should be tackled at the national and, in particular, the local level, in the daily living environment of children and young people by ensuring their full and equal access to decent living standards and social rights, including education and training. Relevant strategies need to respect human rights in order to avoid inciting further resentment.

Politically-motivated violence designates the use of violent means to achieve political objectives. From any kind of terrorism to armed struggle performed by political organisations, or even displays of violence during protests perpetrated by small factions, political violence is widespread across cultures and ideologies. To this day, political violence remains a key challenge to governments and state agencies. More specifically, one can identify two main issues that are relevant to policy makers, but still, constitute a theoretical puzzle to social scientists. These are, namely, issues pertaining to the increasingly endogenous nature of terrorist threats such as 'homegrown terrorism' and 'foreign fighters', and to the parallel rise of antagonistic, violent political factions, literally feeding on each other's

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 26 Council of Europe website:

www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance

actions as in intergroup co-radicalisation processes, such as between Islamist groups and far-right ones.

The term 'radicalisation' was perceived in the 1970s and 1980s as socio-political opposition to the notions of capitalism and democracy. The meaning of the term had a different turn in the aftermath of September 11. Since then, radicalisation is mainly perceived as an individualised process by which 'lone-wolves' became active agents of terrorism on the one hand, and, home-grown terrorism and online radicalisation became more widespread on the other hand.

In the aftermath of September 11, a global war on terror was initiated by the US, first in Afghanistan in 2001, and then in Iraq in 2003 to fight back against the Al-Qaeda and its adherents. In March 2004, the so-called 'home-grown terrorists' took the stage in Madrid bombing the central train station. Following such deadly attacks in Madrid (2003) and London (2005), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued various resolutions addressing the growing importance of home-grown terrorism and its root causes.

The so-called "refugee crisis" erupting in 2015, has caused a turn in the transformation of debates on 'home-grown terrorists' to 'foreign fighters'. Since then, the discussions on radicalisation in the European public space are about those on the path to becoming foreign fighters and their returning home. In addition to the rise of debates on 'home-grown terrorism' and 'foreign fighters' since 9/11, there is another essential element that needs to be analysed: the processes of co-radicalisation between right-wing extremists and Muslim extremists, or in other words, between Islamophobists and Islamists. The term co-radicalisation springs from the observation that intergroup hostility generates intergroup conflicts through ideological extremisation. These intergroup conflicts have a propensity to perpetuate themselves through cycles of reciprocal threat, violence and extremisation.

The cycles of co-radicalisation sometimes lead to intractable conflicts and explain the parallel rise of antagonistic violent extremist factions such as the conflicts between Islamist groups *and* white supremacists. Such escalation cycles have been anticipated across Europe in the aftermath of 9/11. On the one hand, the wave of terrorist attacks in European cities in the 2010s has created a strong resentment against the liberal refugee policies of some European states. On the other hand, the threatening atmosphere created by far-right extremists against Muslim minorities could explain why youngsters from Muslim backgrounds would increasingly turn to extreme forms of religious ideologies (i.e. Wahhabism and Salafism) and, for some of them, to *Islamist* terrorist organisations.

Terrorism is by no means a novel phenomenon, nor is it limited to Islamist groups and ideology. It is true however that Islamist-driven terror attacks are now on the rise, along with right-wing terrorism which had declined significantly from 1995 to 2001. In fact, both right-wing and Islamist terrorist attacks seem to display some correlation and respond to one another more strongly after the September 11 attacks. There might be many reasons behind this correlation, or co-radicalisation process, ranging from the growing impact of social media on radicalisation and co-radicalisation to the changing definition of politics from being about consensus to being about dissensus. In other words, co-radicalisation between right-wing and Islamist terrorist groups becomes apparent after the year 2001 in Europe.

The reality in Europe today is that not only young radical Muslims, but also other Muslim-origin youngsters are becoming politically mobilised to support causes that have less to do with faith and more to do with communal solidarity. The manifestation of global Muslim solidarity can be described as an identity based on vicarious humiliation. European Muslims develop empathy for Muslim victims elsewhere in the world and convince themselves that their own exclusion and that of their co-religionists have the same root

cause: *Western rejection of Islam*, which partly leads to the co-radicalisation of some segments of native and Muslim-origin youths. The process of co-radicalisation leads some Muslim groups to generate alternative forms of politics of identity based on radicalisation, violence, religiosity and extremism. To that effect, the quest for identity, authenticity, religiosity and violence should not be reduced to an attempt to essentialise the so-called purity. It is rather a form of politics generated by alienated, humiliated and excluded subjects. In this sense, Islam is no longer simply a religion for those radical individuals, but also a counter hegemonic global political movement, which prompts them to defend the rights of their Muslim brothers across the national boundaries.

In order to understand the root-causes of radicalisation of both self-identified Muslims and self-identified natives, EU Member states and Turkey must join forces. Co-funding scientific studies could be a good start, and this could be followed by the introduction of tangible programmes in which the individual members of both sides can communicate with each other to understand the root causes of mutual hatred.

Parallel Communities of Muslims

In several European countries, labour immigration was halted in 1974 due to economic recession and electoral choices. The decision was taken as a result of the 1973 oil crisis and growing unemployment, which lessened the need for foreign labour. A deindustrialisation process followed the 1974 economic crisis, which resulted in the unemployment of high numbers of manual immigrant labour, mostly of Muslim origin. Since then, many Muslim-origin immigrants and their descendants have been prompted to socially, politically, culturally, and even economically, mobilise themselves within their own ethno-religious frameworks through constructing isolated communitarian parallel communities to protect themselves against

the perils of globalisation. The construction of isolated parallel communities has brought about two very important consequences in many European societies. On the one hand, it has reinforced ethno-religious boundaries between majority societies and migrant-origin groups leading to different forms of ethnic competition in the urban space, especially among the working-class segments of local communities. On the other hand, it has strengthened the process of alienation between in-groups and out-groups leading to the decline of intergroup contact. The decline of intergroup contact provides a fertile ground for the spread of Islamophobic sentiments and anti-Muslim prejudices.

Ethno-cultural and religious identities generated by minorities in such communitarian parallel communities do not necessarily translate into their quest for isolation from the majority society. An alternative reading of the construction and articulation of such identities and parallel communities can also be made. One could assume that such communitarian parallel communities are a product of the quest for equality and justice. It should be remembered that Muslims, who are politically underrepresented, intersectionally discriminated, and perceived as a threat to national, social and cultural security of their countries of residence, can be expected to turn inward and establish parallel communities as a response to such acts of structural exclusion and discrimination. Several surveys such as the ones held by FRA in 2017, clearly show the forms and levels of discrimination that Muslims encounter in Europe. Accordingly, there are multiple forms of discrimination that might push Muslims to establish communitarian parallel communities in which they may feel protected: harassment due to ethnic or immigrant background, discrimination resulting from visible religious symbols, such as traditional or religious clothing, discrimination resulting from Muslim names, skin colour or physical appearance when looking for housing,

work or receiving healthcare.⁴² ECRI's country monitoring reports also reveal that prohibitions on religious clothing and symbols in various European countries may have triggered discrimination and exclusion in employment, access to basic services and education. This has particularly affected Muslim girls and women.

Islamic parallel communities manifest in European countries such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands (countries with colonial or semi-colonial backgrounds) are not the result of the conservatism of Muslims, but rather their reaction to the structural and political mechanisms of exclusion. In other words, religiosity is too important to be limited to the beliefs of said minorities, because what may lie beneath religiosities are the structural problems of racism, discrimination, Islamophobia, xenophobia, injustice, poverty and unemployment.

Although it is without doubt that social and class tensions erupt from such structural problems, some state administrations, populist parties, the media, and even intellectuals, intentionally or unintentionally make wrong diagnoses of, and misrepresent, the issue to the public, which in turn make it almost impossible to solve it. Is it really their cultural differences, their anti-integrationist, reactionary attitudes and their Islamic identity that consider fighting against Christianity a religious duty that takes Muslims to the street? Or, are their mass-opposition and social movements the manifestation of a resistance against almost two centuries of colonialism, exclusion, racism, xenophobia and the more recent conditions of poverty? Answers to these two essential questions provide clues to how individuals, institutions and the state approach the problem. Those who answer the first question positively find the Islamic, the culturally different, and the ethnically diverse "problematic" by nature. For them, the "Others" are expected to eliminate their

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 27 FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017). *Second European Union Minorities*, p. 9.

differences and become assimilated into the dominant civilisation project. Those who respond positively to the second question are the ones who have made the diagnoses with regard to the root-causes of self-isolation of Muslims, that is racism, structural inequalities, injustices, stereotypes, colonialism, orientalism and deep-rooted institutional and intersectional discrimination.

As the processes of de-industrialisation since the late 1970s and the rise of inequalities in politics, education, the labour market, health services and the judiciary increasingly alienate Muslims from the majority of societies, they have come to hold on to religion, ethnicity, language and tradition, whatever they believe cannot be taken away from them, even more tightly. Discrimination in everyday life has become common for many Muslim individuals and communities in Europe. The FRA Survey on Muslims held in 2017 clearly reveals that Muslims in Europe often suffer discrimination when looking for a job and this hampers their meaningful participation in society.⁴³ The same survey also finds that Muslim names, skin colour or physical appearance prompt discrimination against about half of the respondents when looking for housing, work or receiving healthcare.⁴⁴ Populist political parties have lately indulged in deliberate misreadings, which result in the syndrome depicting that Muslims are “enemies within” who must be eliminated. Given the problematic representation and statisticalisation of immigrants and Muslims in the media and political sphere, the issue runs into a dead-end. When all misinterpretations and misevaluations add up, it is easy to see how smoothly “next-door neighbours” can be turned into “enemies within”.

Populist parties and movements often exploit the issues of parallel communities, migration and Islam, and portray them as a threat against the welfare and the social, cultural, and even ethnic features

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 28 FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017). *Second European Union Minorities*.

29 *Ibid.*, p.9.

of a nation. Populist leaders also tend to blame parallel communities of Muslims for some of the major problems in society such as unemployment, violence, crime, insecurity, drug trafficking and human trafficking. This tendency is reinforced by the use of a racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic and demeaning rhetoric. The use of words like 'influx', 'invasion', 'flood' and 'intrusion' are just a few examples. Many public figures in Europe have so far spoken of a 'foreign infiltration' of immigrants, especially Muslims, in their countries. Some political leaders even predicted the coming of *Eurabia*, a mythological future continent that will replace modern Europe, where children from Norway to Naples will allegedly learn to recite the Koran at school, while their mothers stay at home wearing *burqas*. Referring to the growing visibility of Muslims in the European space, some right-wing populist leaders effectively deploy the fear of Islam as a great danger in the foreseeable future.

Some populist politicians began to unmask the immigration of Muslims as an integral part of a deliberate strategy of Islamification.⁴⁵ To support such a claim, such politicians may refer to a whole range of Arabists, orientalist, political scientists, journalists and politicians who may boast a reasonably solid reputation such as Bat Ye'or, Bernard Lewis, Oriana Fallaci, Samuel Huntington, Hans Jansen, Pim Fortuyn and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Such populist politicians have also openly criticised Islam by aligning themselves with the liberal and civilisational attitude towards certain cultural issues such as the emancipation of women and homosexuals. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has also deplored that a growing number of political parties in Europe exploit and encourage the fear of Islam and organise political campaigns which promote simplistic

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30 The term 'Eurabia' was first introduced by Bat Ye'Or, whose real name is Gisell Litmann, an Egyptian-born British citizen and key figure in the UK-based Counter-Jihad Movement (CJM), living in Switzerland.

and negative stereotypes concerning Muslims in Europe and often equate Islam with extremism and terrorism.⁴⁶

EU member states and Turkey can again join forces to work together against the formation of parallel communities by Muslim-origin migrants and their descendants residing in European countries. Rather than religious-based diaspora politics, Turkey can introduce activities and policies underlining civic and active citizenship models for the members of its diaspora so that Turkish-origin individuals may have better recognition by member states. In return, member states can also work harder to incorporate Turkish-origin individuals on a civic basis without framing them on the basis of their ethno-cultural and religious differences.

Conclusion

Both issues raised in this piece deserve a closer look by the EU and Turkey, that aspires a communicative action away from civilisational perceptions distancing and polarising the parties. This communicative action should be evidence-based and embrace scientific research conducted by the collaboration of researchers from both sides. Since both items discussed in this piece, i.e. conflating Muslims with terrorism and constructing parallel communities, have transnational elements, they need to be assessed with a transnational perspective embracing a multitude of approaches trying to understand their root causes. Both issues can be discussed in the multilateral conference on the Eastern Mediterranean to find ways to bridge self-identified Muslims and self-identified natives to communicate with each other without any prejudice. The multilateral conference can be a venue where both sides can announce their will to bridge the gap between host communities and migrant-origin individuals.

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 31 See Resolution 1743 (2010), www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17880&lang=en

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