



## **COUNTERTERRORISM AND THE INTEGRATION OF ISLAM IN EUROPE**

**by Jytte Klausen**

Samuel Huntington's theory of a global confrontation between Islam and "the West" is particularly attractive in Europe, where problems with Islamic minorities are regarded as local skirmishes in an international struggle at the heart of which lie values, symbols, and identity, and where conflicts over what to do with Muslims have reopened old debates about the position of religion in society and created unlikely political alliances.

French President Jacques Chirac enjoyed one of his few political victories when he proposed a law prohibiting girls from going to school wearing the Muslim headscarf. The law overwhelmingly passed the National Assembly in 2004; oddly, Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, which advocates tough measures against immigrants, voted against it due to worries that secularists would put restrictions on Christians next.

Other politicians blame religion in general for stirring up trouble, and regard Islam as an unwelcome setback in the fight against clerical authority. Former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt wrote in his 2004 autobiography that he regrets having allowed Muslim labor migrants into the country, since evidently Christians and Muslims cannot tolerate each other. Schmidt blamed the Christian churches for promoting resentment against Muslims, but also suggested that accommodation between Islam and Christianity is possible only in authoritarian states such as Singapore.

The reaction against Islam has even made Europeans reassess the importance of Christianity. When Baden-Württemberg passed a law in 2004 prohibiting teachers from wearing the headscarf in the classroom, notwithstanding that the crucifix is by law displayed in public classrooms, it argued that Christian symbols are universal and "democratic," whereas Muslim women wearing the headscarf are "proselytizing." The state's then culture minister, Annette Schavan, warned against value neutrality. "We cannot allow a spiritual vacuum to emerge that would leave our society without guidance," she said. "We must stand by our cultural and religious traditions as they are expressed in our Constitution."

Religious pluralism, an unintended consequence of labor immigration, has raised difficult questions about the requirements of religious toleration. The Madrid train bombings on March 11, 2004 and the July 7, 2005 bombings of the London Underground, which reinforced the perception that Islam is a threat to the European social and political system, also induced governments and politicians to reconsider how Islam might become a "European" religion.

National security and religious toleration are now widely regarded as interrelated issues, and proposals for funding Islam have the support of security officials. Ian Blair, the Chief of the UK's Metropolitan Police, endorses a partnership between Muslim associations and the government in order to "separate the extremists from the faith." But are European Muslims willing to become partners in counterterrorism? And can security concerns overcome political resistance to extending recognition and representation to Muslims?

In researching *The Islamic Challenge*, I interviewed hundreds of European Muslim civic and political leaders in the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark, members of what I describe as the new Muslim political elite, to learn how important faith is to them and what if any effect it has on their policy positions.

Islam is today the largest minority religious denomination in Europe. There are more Muslims than Catholics in the Protestant north, and more Muslims than Protestants in the predominantly Roman Catholic countries. There are about 15 million Muslims in Western Europe, but only about 25 have been elected to European parliaments.

In only a few countries does the census ask people their religion. In one of them, the UK, it is estimated that about 1 million (out of 1.6 million) Muslims were eligible to vote in the May 2005 election. In other countries, estimates are derived from immigration statistics and estimated fertility rates. In France, there are perhaps 5-6 million--some estimate only 2.6 million--Muslims, few of whom vote. The Netherlands has the highest proportion of Muslims --about 6 percent of Dutch residents, about half of whom can vote. In Germany, 0.5 million of the estimated 3 million Muslims can vote. In Italy, Muslims, like other immigrants, are overwhelmingly illegal, and so only an estimated 50,000 of Italy's 2 million Muslims can vote.

The diversity of ethnicity and national origin varies greatly from country to country and is increasing with new waves of political refugees from new hotspots of civil war and with the growing presence of native-born Muslims, who prefer to speak the language they have grown up with. The early waves of immigrants to Europe held on to the “myth of return” and organized in transnational networks with the primary aim of retaining contact to the home country.

In the 1990s the emigre associations of the past gave way to new national associations, often modeled on organizations created for other faiths. The Muslim Council of Britain (formed in 1997) and the Council of Muslims in Germany (formed in 1995) both imitate the Jewish Council in organization and objectives. The French council for the Islamic faith, *Conseil français du culte Musulman*, was set up by the government in 2002 based upon the model of the *Consistoire* for Jews created in 1808. With the notable exception of terrorists and radical clerics, European Muslims’ political engagement and expectations have since the 1990s increasingly become framed in national European idioms.

#### WHO ARE THE MUSLIM LEADERS?

Many of the people I interviewed referred to themselves as “typically second-generation,” using the term to describe a political outlook focused on integration and acceptance of European norms. Actually, most of the current generation of leaders are themselves immigrants. Most had arrived as young adults, either as a political refugee or a student. Some had been politically active in the universities and the security services had caught up with them. Most had completed secondary education prior to emigrating and were from middle-class families with histories of learning and political engagement. The share of native-born leaders was highest in Great Britain and the Netherlands, reflecting the earlier onset of mass migration to those countries.

#### POLITICAL AGENDAS

My findings support in part the argument made by Fouad Ajami and Niall Ferguson: that European Muslims have brought their political agendas with them from the Islamic countries, that Europe’s Muslim associations are Trojan horses for the banned Islamic organizations in the home countries, and that Muslim political activism in Europe is driving a wedge between the U.S. and Europe on important foreign policy issues. But it also needs to be said that restrictive-access naturalization is a barrier to immigrant participation in mainstream political organizations and forces Muslims to organize in “Muslims-only” organizations.

Some of the most notorious clerics active in Europe--Abu Bakri Mohammad, the founder of al Muhajiroun, and Abu Hamza al-Masri of Finsbury Park Mosque fame--were granted political-refugee status in Europe in the mid-1980s, when European policies were lenient. The Danish imam Abu Laban, who was responsible for having a folder of Danish political cartoons delivered to Cairo and Damascus, is also a political refugee, barred from travel to Egypt. These extremists found political freedom in Europe to continue their projects, but so too did Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Dutch-Somali politician who has gained fame for her criticism of Islam. Far more of the political refugees of the 1980s were liberals than Islamists. Many described themselves as fighting a similar battle now to the one they had fought before, whether the objective was the Islamic state, human rights, anti-fundamentalism, or freedom from religious compulsion of any sort.

#### BEING MUSLIM

In Europe, “Muslim” connotes ethnicity and origin as well as faith. Muslims are Europe’s new religious *and* ethnic minority. Individuals balance this in different ways. For some, faith is the key source of identity, but for many more faith takes a backseat to origin and the increasing hostility with which the surroundings recognize Muslims as “other people.”

As the media and xenophobic politicians propagate stereotypes of Muslims, Muslims react to the perceived bias and appropriate the label as a source of counter-mobilization. Islamophobia is how Muslims describe the “culture war.” Non-believers self-identify as Muslims and say they are victimized by discrimination. Believers feel singled out and misrepresented. Both groups respond by asserting their identity. Of course, the radicals weave a conspiratorial tale about bias and injustice into a political utopia about Islamic domination.

Observers of European politics often assume that the “integrated” Muslims, those who participate in political life, have left their faith behind. The German term *Kultur-Muslim*, “culturally-Muslim,” is often used to describe individuals who do not display their faith. But one cannot presume that religiosity is incompatible with civic competency or that the integrated Muslims are apostates. Most of the leaders in my study said that Islam was important to them personally, but religiosity did not predict political affiliations.

Most of the very religious belonged to the political center or the left. The largest subgroup in my study consisted of personally religious self-described centrists. Non-believers, in contrast, belonged mostly to the far left or to the secular conservative parties. Many religious Muslims indicated that ideally they would support the Christian Democratic parties. In the Netherlands, Muslims have joined that party in large numbers, and two Muslims in parliament were elected from the CDA.

The German Christian Democratic party has chosen instead to reemphasize Christianity as a prerequisite for being German. Many German Muslims regretfully conclude that they cannot support the party and turn instead to the Greens. Europe’s Christian Democratic parties have long used the term “secularly Christian” to describe their distinctive objectives, and only the Dutch CDA has responded to the presence of non-Christian conservative voters by developing an Abrahamic approach, emphasizing the presumed commonality among Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, to the representation of the interests of believers.

Abortion, gay rights, and bioethics are some of the issues where religious Muslims find common ground with other religious associations and lobbies. The MCB has steadfastly maintained that homosexuality is a sin and has joined the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Church in opposing gay adoption rights. When MCB General Secretary Sir Iqbal Sacranie was criticized for denouncing same-sex relationships, the organization pointed to the split in the Anglican Church over gays and declared that Muslims would not be “bullied” into speaking against scripture.

Many religious Muslims nonetheless regard “value conservatism” as less salient than other issues, which are generally important for the left—in particular, anti-discrimination enforcement and social protection. Centrist Muslims often migrate to the Green parties, because of those parties’ human rights emphasis. The preponderance of centrists among the more religious leaders may also reflect a choice on the part of the Muslim associations to avoid becoming taken for granted by the social democratic or Labour parties that historically have been able to count on immigrant voters.

Party choice also depends on what the political parties offer. French Muslims complained bitterly about the Socialist party’s intolerance of religious expression, remarking that you had to be committed to “the holy principle of *laïcité*” (a form of secularism that prohibits public recognition of faith) to succeed in the party.

Among the minority of non-believers were some I describe as radical secularists. They would say, “We do not need imams here,” or “The problem with Islam is that it cannot change.” They readily identified with European anti-clericalism.

Among the believers, views varied with respect to the need for theological reform. Some argued that “Islam is what it is,” while others embraced Tariq Ramadan’s idea that European Muslims have a historic opportunity to revitalize the faith. A French Islamist praised liberty for the same reasons religious groups have supported the First Amendment in the U.S. He opposed the French government’s plans for a “French Islam,” because “We have for the first time the liberty to develop Islam freely.”

On integration, there was consensus that ties to the Islamic countries must be cut and ways found to educate imams at European universities and normalize the legal situation of mosque communities. There was disagreement, however, about how far to push equity with the Christian churches. Some perceived government pressure to “Christianize” Islam; some argued that governments should provide “help to self-help” but otherwise leave it to Muslims to build the institutions of their faith. Others argued for legal and institutional parity. “What goes for the pastor goes for the imam,” said a Danish city councilor.

Islam’s development over the past 200 years has been characterized by the collapse of religious authority. In Europe, migration has allowed Islam to develop in the absence of clerical control. One consequence is a return to the “book.” Many young people are learning Arabic and reading the Quran to “make up their own mind” about what it says. Of course, the text is inaccessible absent theory or interpretation, and while some of Europe’s Muslims celebrate the freedom to interpret the Quran anew, others battle to protect orthodoxy against assimilation.

## THE IMAMS

There are perhaps 10,000 imams in Western Europe: at least one for each of the 250 mosques in Sweden, 150 in Denmark, 400 in the Netherlands, probably 1,600 each in Britain and France, and 2,600 in Germany. Most of these countries do not know the exact number of mosques, who preaches in them, or where the imams come from. Many are “backyard mosques,” a concern for both security agencies and Muslim leaders.

A French security agency conducted a census that identified over a thousand imams, about half working full-time. Less than half were paid regularly; the rest were paid in kind or unpaid. Of those who were paid, Turkey supported 60, Algeria 80, and Morocco two. Saudi Arabia paid the salaries of a dozen graduates of Saudi Islamic universities. Less than 20 percent were French nationals, and most of them are naturalized. Half were of Moroccan or Algerian origin.

Imams are mostly recruited by local mosque councils through kinship networks in the home country. Muslims often complain that these imams are out of touch with the younger, European-born generations of Muslims and do not speak the language. Indeed, only one-third of the imams in the French study spoke French with ease, another third with some difficulty, and the rest not at all.

Similarly, most British imams are trained abroad and recruited by local mosque councils. So long as a mosque council guarantees that it will provide an income for the imam, work permits have not generally been a problem. But Muslim community elders tend to recruit from the villages that they came from, which often means imams who were educated in madrassas. One leader of a mosque association representing one-third of Britain’s mosques reported that 80 percent of his association’s imams were ill-prepared to cope with the demands made upon them by the members of the mosque communities and by local governments and other civic groups.

In northern Europe, Turkey is the single largest source of imams. When Turkish “guest workers” began to appear in large numbers in Scandinavia, Germany and the Netherlands, those countries’ governments entered into contracts with Turkey to supply pastoral care. The imams are paid by the Turkish government and granted temporary visas by the national governments. The Turkish imams do not preach “political nonsense,” my interviewees told me, but are nonetheless no solution for Muslims who want Islam to have a self-sustaining European basis.

Host states’ policy at the time was to maintain ties between the migrants and the home countries, to sustain the fiction that the

migrants were a temporary solution to overheated labor markets. Both host governments and “sender” governments sought to prevent integration; wanting the migrants to return home at the end of their working years.

Today, everyone wants integration. A few European Muslims believed the Islamic countries have the religious scholars and “know best” how to train imams, but a large majority said that it was an immediate priority to end dependency upon the Islamic countries.

Interviewees observed that throughout Europe, theological faculties educate Christian clergy, and governments make funds available for clergy salaries and houses of worship, but Muslims have access to none of these resources. Many favored mainstreaming Islam within existing national state-church frameworks, but a plurality preferred greater self-governance for mosque communities. Still, nearly everyone considered public funding to be essential for integration.

“Where will the money come from?” The question was raised in every country. The Christian churches and many voters are resistant to change. “It is difficult today to argue that Muslims have special needs,” one Muslim member of the Dutch parliament explained to me. “All Dutch voters can think about is how they are disadvantaged by the foreigners.” Another parliamentarian said, “it does no good for Muslims to demand more rights, when most people already think we are getting too much.”

## COUNTERTERRORISM POLICIES

Counterterrorism policies may be the way to break the logjam over public support for the development of mosque communities. Following the July 2005 attacks, the British government launched a new community-based approach to counterterrorism. Described as a “partnership against extremism,” the initiative signaled a shift from counterintelligence to prevention. The government consulted with Muslim community representatives and in October 2005 published its recommendations in a report entitled *Preventing Extremism Together*, which includes proposals ranging from improving community-police relations to establishing imam education and mosque accreditation procedures.

While there have been complaints about the lack of follow-up, the process has nonetheless produced reform. Aiming to forestall government-sponsored monitoring, four Muslim associations that do not normally cooperate--the MCB, the Muslim Association of Britain, the British Muslim Forum, and the al-Khoei Foundation--have created the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, to promote “best practices in the country’s 1600 mosques.”

Are these measures effective counterterrorism measures or simply good public policy? The days when extremists were recruited in mosques and plots hatched with the assistance of clerics such as Abu Hamza al-Masri may be over. The social activities of the July bombers show that today terrorists are more likely to bond while engaging in ultimate sports like paintballing or watching DVDs of atrocities against Muslims and footage of suicide bombers in private homes. It may be a Pyrrhic victory for those who wish for the normalization of Islam in Europe if mosques have ceased to be a meeting place for terrorists. Will governments go back to disregarding the need to facilitate the integration of Islam?

## WHY NOW?

There are far fewer Muslims in America than in Europe, and they are generally better educated, more likely to come from the Middle East, and wealthier. American Muslims may not have citizenship, but their children will, and when it comes to building mosques and practicing Islam, U.S. Muslims encounter little government resistance. In contrast, European Muslims are poor. Between one-quarter and one-half of them are disenfranchised permanent residents, with no prospects of naturalization for themselves or their children due to restrictive citizenship laws. Large numbers live in highly segregated neighborhoods, with no access to work or transportation, and send their children to sub-par “minority majority” schools. Pockets of Europe today look very much like the U.S. prior to civil rights.

Why are there problems with Muslims in Europe now, when earlier generations of them lived there quietly for decades? The answer is not Sept. 11 and the rise of Islamism, as many assume, but that European Muslims have now decided to integrate, and to do so they seek reforms that will enable them to practice their faith and be European. European Muslims in the mid 1980s arrived at the moment of collective realization that the “myth of return” was exactly that. When European Muslims started to create institutions for practicing their faith and attaining political representation, reactions started at local politics, with protests against mosque construction and the uproar over the headscarf.

From an American viewpoint, European Muslims’ integration problems are seen as a consequence of Europe’s general hostility to religion and, worse, a source of increased Muslim alienation and increasing security risks for the West. The 9/11 terrorists’ European domicile and the Madrid and London bombings are, perhaps too quickly, seen as supporting evidence for the dangers that hostility to Islam poses for us all. The problem, in the American view, is not the faith but the perversion thereof. We are fighting “Islamofascism,” as George Bush described the enemy, not Islam.

Neither story gets it right. There are serious problems with the integration of Muslims in Europe, but the alienation that it causes is more likely to express itself in riots such as those that racked the Paris suburbs in Fall 2005. Socioeconomic deprivation and isolation fueled the grievances, and Muslims and non-Muslims were equally likely to join the rioters. Abou Jahjah, known as the “Muslim Malcolm X,” founded the Arab European League to fight the members of the far-right Vlaams Blok in Antwerp, but his ambition is to build a separatist nationalist movement.

The recent terrorism is based upon a political theory of an Islamic utopia that justifies the indiscriminate killing of Muslims and Christians, Americans and non-Americans, as a means to power. Many Muslims believe that killing in the name of the Prophet is an abomination, but it is difficult to draw the line between theology that leads to political extremism and political extremism that assumes the guise of doctrine. As for the view that European Muslims are a wellspring of extremism, we have little reason to believe that European Muslims are more susceptible to extremist *theology* than Muslims in North America or elsewhere.

Why worry about Europeans' problems with Muslims? Because the new political *ideology* of Islamic terrorism has shown a remarkable ability to change and adapt to our responses. The polarization and socioeconomic disadvantage, combined with the generalized escalation of violence against Jews, Muslims, and Christians, provides a fertile ground for recruitment to the extremist cause, even among the anomic progeny of the middle-class and the ranks of university-educated dropouts.

*Jytte Klausen* is associate professor of comparative politics at Brandeis University. Her most recent book is *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). This article is based on Dr. Klausen's presentation to FPRI's History Institute for Teachers on "Islam, Islamism, and Democratic Values," held May 6-7, 2006; it is available online at [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org).

FPRI, 1528 Walnut Street, Suite 610, Philadelphia, PA 19102-3684.

For information, contact Alan Luxenberg at 215-732-3774, ext. 105 or email [fpri@fpri.org](mailto:fpri@fpri.org) or visit us at [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org)