

Muslim Immigration to the EU

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“That night, I went up to the roof-top and saw about 20 people gazing across the Mediterranean Sea, where they could see the lights of the Spanish mainland twinkling on the other side.

It was an amazing sight - after all I had been through, to finally see my destination, even if I knew I hadn't reached it yet.”

Mamadou Saliou "Billy" Diallo, one of the many millions of people living in the developing world, whose lifelong dream has been to seek his fortune in the West

“We're not advocating a 'fortress Europe,' but what we are saying is there's got to be some order and some rules brought into the system whereby people come into Europe.”

Tony Blair

“Immigration is an explosive issue, but politicians will simply not address the big taboos – that immigration is a fact, and it is beneficial.”

Jonas Widgren
Migration expert

“The fact that these latter-day migrants are willing to risk so much underlines a fundamental truth about migration - the movement of people from poor and failing states to rich and stable ones is as inevitable as water running downhill. Every child who's ever built a sandbank on a beach will tell you just how futile it can be to try to stem the tide. If water is a force of nature, then migration is a force of history. The challenge is not to try to stop it but how to manage it.”

George Alagiah
BBC news presenter

“Migration is an evolutionary phenomenon. Transmigration of people and cultures are inevitable, conforming to the global village concept. The relevance of faiths, cultures and ethnicities will erode by way of mixed culture marriages, associations, alliances and partnerships. This will bring greater understanding and manifestation of the human spirit. It will be one cohesive human race. Isn't this what the creator meant, and not division of the human race based on radical religious fanatics and racists?”

Joseph Matthews, Goa, India

Over the past 15 years, the number of people crossing borders in search of a better life has been rising steadily. The current global estimate of international migrants is 175 million, some 3% of the world population, and the number is increasing. “At the start of the 21st Century, one in every 35 people is an international migrant. If they all lived in the same place, it would be the world's fifth-largest country”.¹

As the global debate surrounding migration issues grows, it ought to be reminded that from the Stone Age onwards, people have migrated all over the world. Mobility of persons occurs through choice or necessity. People migrate, temporarily or permanently, to receive education and training, to perform services, to find employment, to flee life-threatening situations or to provide themselves and their children with hope and opportunity. People have always fled from hunger, war and persecution. They have also been driven away, captured and shipped against their will. Many more, however, have moved simply because they thought and hoped that life would be a little bit better elsewhere.

Whether in search of land, peace, prosperity, easier farming or just to see what is over the next hill, movement of people is a simple fact of human history. Global migration nowadays affects every country – they are all either places of origin, transit or destination for migrants. The movement of people across borders is essential in today's globalised world. International business depends heavily on an international labour force, and the ability of people to move around the world with ease. Most developed countries face declining birth rates and ageing populations, which can be mitigated by migration. Remittances earned abroad are the principal support to the economies of many developing countries.

But much of migration today is unregulated. There are not enough legal channels open for those who want to migrate and whose labour may be needed. Criminal smuggling and trafficking networks are matching up the supply of labour with the demand, mostly in the informal economy. As a result, border controls are evaded, with exploitation and security risks for the individuals and societies involved.

Xenophobia and racism flourish to the detriment of host communities and migrants, particularly when governments are perceived to have lost control of the

¹ - Special edition, As part of BBC series on global migration, www.bbc.com

migration situation. Case in point here is Mr Le Pen's success two years ago that showed that "if the mainstream political parties fail to deal with domestic issues, there are other plenty of extreme groups ready to pick them up."²

There is no easy solution to these sensitive problems. The issue of migration is high on the political agenda for European governments and has already become the issue of various political speculations. Many European countries find themselves under pressure to restrict the entry of migrants. "But now migration experts are warning that Europe is missing the point - with the reality of the continent's migrant needs clouded by misinformation and fear."³

Yet, it has been historically proved that when managed effectively migration holds great potential for migrants and for host communities. The ultimate goal is not to obstruct or prevent mobility but to better manage it for the benefit of all.

Immigration is a hotly debated issue in Europe. It is a well-known fact that when a hot debate is underway some essential facts could be lost under a wave of misinformation. Mass media often distracts us from the key points of certain issues. Catchy headlines and figures that turn out to be so elusive and misleading shape our opinion. In order not to be easily manipulated into someone's political game one should try to separate myth from reality. That is no easy task. Each and every day common Europeans are showered with tones of additional information that so far has little or sometimes no relevance to the matter at all. The purpose of this paper is to see whether illegal immigration from the Muslim countries presents a real threat to the European societies? Whether the alarmist tendency that tend to prevail in public mind as far as this issue is concerned is adequate to the challenge Europe faces nowadays? Whether unregulated movement of people presents a challenge at all?

There are no easy answers to these questions as well as no hasty decisions could be taken to handle the situation.

² - Mason B., The rise of the European right, 2002/04/22, www.bbc.com

³ - Mulvey S., EU values - united in diversity? 2004/03/05, www.bbc.com

Part I

The South-West migration flows had become overwhelming by the last decade of the twentieth century. At least half a million people are believed to enter the EU illegally every year. There are no clear figures. Illegal immigration can be hardly controlled because of the EU's extensive borders and coastline.

It was Tony Blair who pointed out that Europe is to tackle at present what is considered to be “one of the most pressing issues of our time, which is the issue of immigration and asylum”.⁴ More than ever before, people are crossing borders and embarking on what are sometimes long and dangerous journeys in search of a better life. Asia, Africa and finally Europe - these are stepping stones to a better life, landmarks along the journey of any migrant family. On their way to Europe each of them has their own share of perils and joys that go on with economic migration.

According to the UN official terminology “economic migrants are those who leave behind their country of origin in order to improve their quality of life. The term is often used to refer to those attempting to enter a country without legal permission and/or those who asylum procedures without bona fide cause.”⁵ These people are not refugees. Migrants, especially economic migrants, choose to move in order to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families, while refugees have to move if they are to save their lives or preserve their freedom. There is no such thing as an "environmental refugee" or an "economic refugee" perhaps that's what makes the situation for an economic migrant even worse. They are not protected by the international law (as refugees or asylum seekers are) yet many of them claim a sanctuary to which they are not entitled. Usually they are not welcomed in the countries of their destination, as they are largely ill-educated workers, often they have no means or desire to return home and restart the miserable life once left behind.

The EU countries have been trying to curb the demographic wave coming to Europe from the South Mediterranean and other regions with the use of traditional methods: restrictive immigration policies and providing for strengthening of economic

⁴ - Tony Blair, EU signals asylum action, 2002/05/21, www.bbc.com

⁵ - Migration glossary, 2004/03/17, www.bbc.com

and political reforms in the South Mediterranean countries to improve living standards, to decrease unemployment and thus lessen the push factors. First turn out to be inefficient from the very beginning. The results of the second one (at least in a short-time perspective) are no more encouraging.

Speaking about economic migration one has to keep in mind that this process is unstoppable. “The movement of people from poor and failing states to rich and stable ones is as inevitable as water running downhill.”⁶ The sad truth about illegal immigration is whatever EU actions are taken to stop the process, however sophisticated are the border controls or coast guard systems nothing can hamper the desire of people to fled from hunger, misery and despair. Moreover the more barriers are put on the way of illegal immigration the more illegal gaps are found in the “fortress” Europe. As practice proves it a ban alone can turn out to be counterproductive.

In this respect the situation in the Mediterranean region provides a kind of a graphic example. This region is responsible for a considerable proportion of the European Community’s immigrants. The differences between the north and the south banks of the Mediterranean are increasing, creating potential serious regional instabilities. “With a high population growth (more than 2% per annum, which implies a doubling over around 30 years) it was calculated that the countries of the region may have a population over 400 million by 2035, and that the wealth gap would undoubtedly grow, meaning that migratory flows are not about to dry up.”⁷

“I wanted to have my own house and give my children the good start in life I never had. Going to Europe seemed to be the best way to achieve these goals. Many of my friends had emigrated - I felt I was being left behind.”⁸

These words prove a simple fact that you may ban whatever you wish still you can not prevent certain things from happening - Europe will always be for immigrants a land of hope that is open and confident.

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⁶ - Alagiah G., Migration: 'A force of history' , 2004/03/24, www.bbc.com

⁷ - Dubois G., The EU and the Mediterranean: Where are we today? Europe-The Mediterranean-Russia: perception of strategies, Moscow, 1998, p. 15

When European governments tackle the problem of illegal immigration they have to resolve a number of other issues that go hand in hand with illegal immigration. There is a growing belief that illegal immigration is accompanied by terrorism, drug-trafficking and organised crime. One reason the EU is so concerned is the involvement of organised crime.

Here we are about to look into the ugliest side to the landscape. Taking advantage of persons seeking a better life, smuggling and trafficking networks have taken hold across the EU. This situation means that considerable resources are to be mobilised to fight illegal migration especially to target traffickers and smugglers. These are the people that are personally interested in the large-scale unregulated movement of people in the region. Actually illegal immigration is their daily bread. Smuggling illegal immigrants into Europe has become a profitable but dangerous business. In fact, trafficking in people is the world's fastest growing criminal business and "preventing and combating trafficking in human beings - a global challenge for the 21st century".⁹

A high degree of organised-crime-involvement and a wide range of illegal operations in various states as countries of origin, transit or destination of trafficked victims are characteristics of human trafficking. Falling frontiers between the European Union Member States are bringing many benefits, but they are also making it easier for criminal organisations to be active across Europe. "Whereas the scourge of organised crime is not new, criminals have been taking advantage of fast moving technological advances such as the Internet, overall globalisation and, as far as the European Union is concerned, the freedom of circulation and establishment the single market entails".¹⁰ The effectiveness of classical instruments and national level responses has diminished against the background of highly sophisticated criminal groups acting strategically at international level. A variety of measures are required, including preventive measures, adequate protection of and assistance to the victims, criminalisation of sexual violence in all its forms, as well as measures to ensure law-enforcement and judicial cooperation. The challenge is therefore both local and global.

⁸ - Mamadou Saliou Diallo, immigrant, Billy's journey: Crossing the Sahara, 2004/03/22, www.bbc.com

⁹ - EU action against trafficking in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children, www.europa.eu.int

The EU leaders have already announced the state of alarm.

*"It is astonishing that, while we teach our children in school about slavery in former times, these modern forms of slavery are flourishing here in the European Union."*¹¹

Tony Blair said human trafficking was often underpinned by organised crime, "by people operating in circumstances that are totally outside the boundaries of the law".¹² The similar concern was expressed by Jose Maria Aznar who emphasised that the EU leaders must be unwavering in their battle to eliminate mafias that deal in human traffic. "Europol says gangs are making as much from human trafficking as they are from drug smuggling."¹³ One of the most challenging issues is border controls. In spite of numerous projects both on the national and the European level the question of how to patrol EU vast borders effectively remains as difficult as ever. "It is estimated that some 400,000 people a year enter the EU illegally."¹⁴ Reliable figures on the scale of people smuggling are hard to come by. Yet behind the official figures there is always a human tragedy. Frequently a journey to a distant European land turns into drama full of lies and deception.

Before expanding on the issue one should trace a distinct line between a human trafficker and a smuggler. The UN defines human trafficking as: *"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."*¹⁵ This exploitation can take different forms, including: prostitution or other kinds of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or

¹⁰ - A common EU approach to the fight against organised transnational crime, www.europa.eu.int

¹¹ - Dan Eliasson, Swedish Justice Ministry, EU seeks common asylum policy, www.bbc.com

¹² - EU signals asylum action, 2002/05/21, www.bbc.com

¹³ - Hagler T., Trafficking: A human tragedy, 2002/02/17, www.bbc.com

¹⁴ - *ibid*, www.bbc.com

practices similar to slavery, the removal of organs. Victims of trafficking have either never consented to the trafficking or their initial consent has been rendered meaningless by the coercive, deceptive or abusive actions of the traffickers. The smuggling of migrants is officially defined as *"the procurement in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a state of which the person is not a national or permanent resident."*¹⁶ It differs from human trafficking in that it involves the consent of the migrants involved and ends with the arrival of the migrants at their destination. Actually there is a world of difference between the two above-mentioned groups, though in reality the line between them is rather vague.

Smugglers can collect thousands of dollars per person to bring would-be immigrants to Western Europe from Asia, Eastern Europe and North Africa. Some pay smugglers up to \$2,000 to make this illegal, always expensive and perilous journey. Often immigrants spend thousands of dollars to be smuggled into the EU only to be conned and dumped elsewhere. Usually immigrants know nothing about the hardships they are to endure. Only the journey itself opens their eyes to the true dangers of the overland trip. Statistics show that for many of those started on the trip it never ends successfully. As immigration controls in Western countries become stricter, illegal immigrants resort to increasingly desperate methods to reach their "promised land", and every year, an unknown number of people, probably in the tens of thousands, die in the attempt.

With a good wind behind you, it only takes 18 minutes to cross the Straits of Gibraltar on a sailboard. With Europe so close, perhaps it is not surprising that so many illegal immigrants from Morocco, other parts of Africa and beyond, are tempted to try their luck with a night ride on the rickety boats known as pateras. The risks are high. The Straits are notorious for their vicious currents and they are congested with shipping - the skipper of a big ferry or ocean liner can easily run down a little boat without even noticing it. That is why this narrow stretch of water is rapidly becoming "a graveyard" for thousands of immigrants. "Eric Shaw, a marine biologist based in Gibraltar, spends

¹⁵ - Migration glossary, 2004/03/17, www.bbc.com

¹⁶ - *ibid*, www.bbc.com

every day in the straits monitoring the dolphin population. He has lost count of the number of bodies he has seen floating in the sea or washed up on the coast.”¹⁷ Usually these bodies remain unidentified, as illegal immigrants often have no documents or identity papers with them, so that if caught by police they won’t be immediately send back to the countries of their origin.

The absence of documents is an ordinary story. As the Spanish Civil Guard Captain Jose Manuel Rebollo explains this: "By some miracle the papers always get lost on the journey so we are dealing with people who have no country and no name. Where can we send them back to?"¹⁸ That is a usual practice.

Speaking about immigration routes one can single out certain favourite ones - via boat from Albania, Tunisia or Morocco into southern Europe; from Sarajevo airport via Croatia and Slovenia into Italy and Austria or overland starting from Istanbul and often ending up in Germany.

With a 4,720-mile (7,600-kilometre) coastline Italy is a popular target for asylum seekers, many of whom use it as a gateway to Europe. Thousands of illegal immigrants try to enter Italy each month. Smugglers then help them make their way to the Italian coast - which is difficult to police - and on through the rest of Europe in lorries or trains.

But the main issue of concern remains the Balkan states. The situation here is far more alarming. “The region is the starting point of one of the main transit routes for illegal immigration to Western Europe and gangs operating along it are believed responsible for smuggling up to 50,000 people a year.”¹⁹ According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) the Balkans have turned into the main gateway for illegal migrants into Western Europe. Illegal immigrants from the Middle East, Africa and Asia make their way to countries like Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina where immigration controls are lax. The IOM estimates that more than 5,000 people pass through Bosnia Herzegovina every month.²⁰

¹⁷ - Ash L., Europe's front line, Marine biologist Eric Shaw and Julian Pettifer on the Straits of Gibraltar, 1999/10/21, www.bbc.com

¹⁸ - *ibid*, www.bbc.com

¹⁹ - Crackdown on human traffickers, 2001/02/04, www.bbc.com

²⁰ - Doole C., Balkans main immigrant route, 2001/04/16, www.bbc.com

This was caused primarily by the series of wars in the Balkans that are responsible for the current unstable situation in this part of Europe. Now that the former Yugoslavia is more or less at peace, the European Union is concerned to ensure that the Western Balkans, so long prey to ethnic conflict, do not become captive to organised criminal structures.

EU foreign ministers agreed that urgent priority should be given to combating human trafficking, most of which appears to be co-ordinated from the region. European leaders have already agreed on certain joint actions to stem the flow of illegal immigrants from the former Yugoslavia. Such actions involve sending teams of immigration staff and police officers to the Balkans (precisely deploying more police and immigration officers in Bosnia as a joint initiative to step up border checks), offering some extra funds or introduction of a "voluntary repatriation" scheme, encouraging people who had made the journey just to seek a better life to return home. The EU also expects more practical co-operation, both from countries in the region that want to put bilateral relations on a new footing - such as Albania, Yugoslavia and Bosnia - and from regions that rely on Western aid, such as Montenegro and Kosovo.

The issue of an even greater concern is Albanian Mafia that is said to be taking control of organised crime on both sides of the Adriatic. Sporadic clashes between Italian policemen and Albanian gangsters are reported to take place in a chase and collision in the Adriatic. One of Italy's top prosecutors, Cataldo Motta, who has identified Albania's most dangerous mobsters, says they are a threat to Western society. "Albanian organised crime has become a point of reference for all criminal activity today, everything passes via the Albanians. The road for drugs and arms and people, meaning illegal immigrants destined for Europe, is in Albanian hands."²¹

But there is another, less dangerous route for migrants. To be on the safe side and half way in Europe immigrants do not have to be exposed to the threat to be drowned in the sea or suffocated in an abandoned lorry somewhere on a deserted European road. Ceuta and Melilla are the unlocked doors into Fortress Europe. These two small Spanish

²¹ - Barron B., Albanian mafia steps up people smuggling, second special report from the southern Adriatic, www.bbc.com

enclaves on the north coast of Morocco are the last fragments in Africa of a once-mighty empire ruled from Madrid. If the immigrants can somehow get in here - it is the same as being in mainland Europe.

So many immigrants have arrived in Ceuta over the past few years that the Spanish government was forced to provide a temporary shelter for them at a former campsite. Most of the inmates are young men from Sub-Saharan Africa, but there are now people from 24 different countries at the camp including Algeria and Iraq. "At first there were just a few hundred, but now the camp houses more than 2,000 people"²² and more and more people arrive every week. Even children have turned up here, some in their mothers' arms and others completely alone, carrying only nametags around their necks. All of them need food and shelter and the site is hopelessly overcrowded. Every day fights break out in the queues for water, there are long queues for food but for many it's worth it for the chance of EU citizenship.

Actually the potential rewards are great. Most of these migrants stay in Ceuta for two to five months. Then they are given temporary work and residents' permits and transferred to the mainland. After a year in Spain they can usually stay on legally. Many end up with Spanish citizenship and they then have the right to move anywhere within the European Union.

Under some pressure from other EU members, the Spanish authorities say they are doing their best to stop illegal immigrants from getting into Ceuta. The eight and a half kilometre double security fence which separates the enclave from Morocco, is now being fitted with razor wire, infra red cameras and heat sensors. But if the migrants do manage to get in, it is virtually impossible to send them back.

Ceuta and Melilla have been European territories for 500 years and Madrid insists that they will forever remain so. Colonial insignia still decorate the pavements of Ceuta. But at present Morocco is actively seeking the return of the enclaves and Spain may have to hand them over - sooner rather than later - if the flood of migrants cannot be stopped.

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²² - Ash L., Europe's front line, Marine biologist Eric Shaw and Julian Pettifer on the Straits of Gibraltar, 1999/10/21, www.bbc.com

Speaking about human trafficking and smuggling of people one should take a more detailed look on one more alarming issue – *child abuse*.

The latest pawns of the people smugglers are children. The EU is overwhelmingly concerned with far greater numbers of illegal immigrants in the years ahead. Local authorities will not order the enforced repatriation of anyone under 18 and the gangsters are aware of this. This is one of the key factors (along with the fact that kids may be easily led astray and involved in prostitution or forced labour) that makes children smuggling an extremely profitable business that provides the most lucrative commodities to criminal gangs.

In search of better lives children leave their homes and their parents too. While some clearly move on willingly mostly children are consigned to smugglers' boats by their families who send them to Europe with orders to somehow find work or make money to send home. Thus, the kids are under pressure from their parents not to mention the stress that comes from the voyage itself, which is getting more and more dangerous. They travel hundreds of miles under horrific conditions.

Unfortunately the greater part of them stand no chance to find any normal job and start earning their living. These kids often fell pray to human traffickers. Belgium's leading child protection agency has warned that hundreds of child migrants and asylum seekers coming to the EU without their parents are going missing. Local child protection agencies have been working to track down missing teenagers lured or abducted from reception centres by traffickers. An alarming number could be falling into the hands of traffickers and prostitution rings. In some cases they have been forced to work off a debt by those who brought them to the EU.

In the town of Alst, outside Brussels, a special centre has been set up to accommodate some of these children. “Appeals for information have now been issued to trace nearly 400 young migrants and asylum seekers who came to Belgium without their parents and are now missing.”²³ But this is not just a Belgian problem, at the very least it will take a team effort across the European Union to beat the criminals who prey on these young lives. Evidently there is an urgent need for more such centres to be founded

²³ - Blunt E., Europe under fire over immigrants: immigration is a controversial issue in Europe, 2001/01/30, www.bbc.com

throughout Europe as a great number of children are disappearing every year, and they are in a very vulnerable situation. They are in a country they don't know - they don't speak the language, they have no money, no friends or families to turn to when they are in difficulties. So, to put it mildly, the prospects for their brighter future are rather gloomy.

The EU ministers discuss ways of cracking down on human trafficking of women and children for sexual and other exploitation.

“It is appalling that in the Europe of the 21st century such barbaric practices are still widespread - even increasing. Because of their very nature these problems recognise no national boundaries. They infect the whole of Europe, and only a European solution can effectively combat them”²⁴.

However the highly complex network of criminal gangs operating across Europe has significantly reduced the efficiency of these initiatives as well as the work of special agencies. Head of the anti-trafficking unit of the Belgian Police Wim Bontinck explained: "If you take out one ring there will be a few colleagues to replace them tomorrow. One member of a ring today will be leader of another ring tomorrow. It is not as simple as the normal mafiosi structure where if you get the top guy in the hierarchy the whole structure collapses."²⁵ The acuteness of this problem does not diminish and better protection for these vulnerable youngsters is needed.

The main challenge is the lack of common EU policy towards people smugglers. The effectiveness of classical instruments and national level responses has diminished against the background of highly sophisticated criminal groups acting strategically at international level. A major issue is how to make sure that the external borders of Europe are made more secure against the illegal trafficking of people. European politics have already named human trafficking a real disaster on the European scale. Officials are reported to favour a Europe-wide sentence for traffickers. Sentences of up to 14 years for

²⁴ - Antonio Vitorino, Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner , Commission proposes action to combat trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation of children, Brussels, 2000/12/21, www.europa.eu.int

²⁵ - Doole C., Balkans main immigrant route, www.bbc.com

criminals profiting from the world's fastest growing illegal trade could be introduced as part of the crackdown.²⁶ Yet smuggling penalties vary in different European countries. For instance, in Britain which suffer heavily from organised people smuggling they currently face a 10-year sentence, less in many other EU countries. Co-ordinated european actions are mainly hampered by the fact that interests of many are involved in this dirty business. "Europe faces the biggest problem because there's so much money being made which was not the case before. It has become the main source of money for organised crime."²⁷ The sheer numbers helped increase the backlogs, slow down the system, and thereby nourish the smuggling business. So, it is hard to imagine how Europe can fight this kind of well-shaped international organisation.

Part II

However alarming the situation might be on the EU borders still more problems arise within the EU confines. Mass influx of immigrants particularly from the Muslim countries of the Mediterranean region to the EU brought about the problems of a different nature.

"I just wish someone would come down here and explain what's going on, why they're all here. I tried to speak in a council meeting and I was told to sit down and shut up. They just keep saying there isn't a problem, that the numbers have been reduced – but there's still a lot".²⁸

Up to now the Member States have primarily worried about the strengthening of the "European fortress" walls rather than about the fate of those who had already penetrated inside. Meanwhile the appearance of "immigration nation" in the EU countries has been influencing their life and has already led to the process of their transformation into "cultural pluralistic" societies. "The unstoppable migration pressure and the way immigrants insert in the European environment thus transforming it through changes in demographic composition into "culturally pluralistic" societies are the clear evidence of a

²⁶ - Crackdown on human traffickers, 2001/02/04, www.bbc.com

²⁷ - Barron B., Albanian mafia steps up people smuggling, Second special report from the southern Adriatic, 2001/ 05/17, www.bbc.com

²⁸ - Marie Hart, 85, ex-councillor, Special edition, As part of BBC series on global migration, www.bbc.com

blending of civilisations”.²⁹ The West is already quite 'Islamic', because there are millions of Muslims living in so-called Western countries, and Muslim cultural and intellectual influences are found throughout European culture. Though the vast majority of them live happily beside their neighbours, submit readily to the laws of the land, work hard, hold strict family values and commit no crimes, their presence is becoming more and more frequently identified with a “threat” and associated with the rise of organised crime, terrorism and drug trafficking. The growing belief that crime as a virtual monopoly of the ethnic minorities, whether from North or West Africa or Eastern Europe breeds religious and ethnic intolerance, racism and xenophobia, sometimes made even worse by racist politicians. Public concern about European immigration has found unprecedented expression in the ballot box, propelling right and far-right parties to success in country after country.

With the September 11th attacks executed if not planned by western-based Muslims the public debate concerning the issue reached its climax. “That several of the perpetrators of the attacks on the twin towers had apparently lived for years in western countries raised further worries about the enclosed societies that seem to exist within the West, societies in which hate could be preached and treachery plotted while all around non-Muslims remained utterly unaware”.³⁰ After 11th September, living abroad has become quite unbearable for the Muslims. Most of the Westerners have equalised Islam with terror, violence and disorder:

*“Until 9/11, I was indifferent about Islam. After 9/11, I started looking into it more. As a result, I became opposed to Islam”.*³¹

*“Islam is a religion that is anti-progressive. It also preaches hatred against people of other beliefs. The Islamic belief is anti-democratic and anti-establishment”.*³²

Unfortunately this tendency within the western societies is still on the rise.

²⁹ - Olga Yu. Potemkina, From the Barcelona Declaration to the Amsterdam Treaty: changing of the EU Immigration Policy, Europe-The Mediterranean-Russia: perception of strategies, Moscow, 1998, p. 165

³⁰ - Dim drums throbbing in the hills half heard, Special report, Muslims in the Western Europe, The Economist, August 10th 2002, p. 21

³¹ - Graeme Phillips, Berlin, Germany, BBC Forum Does the West understand Islam enough?

³² - Efoe Livingstone, England, The second BBC Forum on ‘Islam and the West’ by Paul Reynolds

Part of the problem lies with the slant of the western media. Deliberately or not the media constantly portray Islam in a negative manner thus fuelling ignorance and hatred within Western society. “Islam’s image in the eyes of mainstream Western media has been associated with turbans, veils, terrorism and violence. While not denying some genuine evils of various kinds involving Islamism or in the name of Islam, they represent only part of the truth”.³³ The fact is that we never get to see the other side of the coin. As a result ignorance breeds misunderstandings and creates unfounded fears and barriers, which lead to racism and xenophobia.

Whether Muslims like it or not, the face of Islam to the world at present is one of violence despite their protestations to the contrary. Recently too many horrors have been committed in the name of Islam. Given this fact it comes as no surprise that people came to associate Islam with terrorism and they easily confuse such words as Islamism and Islam. It will take years now and would require the larger Muslim community efforts to eradicate this pervasive violent image of Islam and “to wrest it back from the fanatical mullahs who have hijacked Islam for the past several centuries”.³⁴

* * *

Yet the spread of radical Islam is not a kind of a phantom that haunts the Europe through mass media channels. Islamism has already become its everyday reality.

“Religious re-awakening, often in the form of fundamental revivalism, is a major phenomenon in the world today, especially in the Islamic regions.”³⁵ The cultural image of Islamism has been seen as violent, backward, insular, anti-secular and anti-modern. It is expanding dramatically and is portrayed as a new post-Cold War threat to the West. Yet for many people in the Middle East and in other parts of the world Islamism is ideally suited not only as a spiritual alternative against Western materialism and consumerism but also as an outlet for protest against corruption, repression and injustice. Moreover it provides disaffected and dispossessed people with a new identity and new meaning in life. “Islamic fundamentalist movements are seen as the form of resistance,

³³ - Xing Li, Dichotomies and Paradoxes: the West and Islam, Global Society, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2002, p. 413

³⁴ - Ghulam Faruki, Queensbury, NY USA, The second BBC Forum on ‘Islam and the West’ by Paul Reynolds

³⁵ - Xing Li, Dichotomies and Paradoxes: the West and Islam, Global Society, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2002, p. 417

opposed to the global spread of Western values, culture conspicuous consumption”.³⁶ The 9.11 attacks are believed to be its most violent manifestation, a kind of a fundamental clash between the democratic West and the Islamic cultural system.

The European Community has always been gravely concerned with the surge of radical Islamic fundamentalism and the threat it poses to the stability of the Mediterranean. “In fact, rightly or wrongly, Europe (as part of the West) is seen, by opposition groups, especially Islamists, as an instrument of global power and oppression in the disguise of universal values and is believed to support the regimes these same groups are strenuously fighting against”.³⁷ That is why the emergence of extremist and fundamental forces in a number of North African States seriously alarmed Europe.

Yet the subject of even greater concern is the fact that nowadays “the threat of Islamism to the EU is felt even more from within the European societies than from without”.³⁸ The case in point here is a notorious story of Kamel Daudi, who was brought to France from Algeria by his parents at the age of five and by all means represented the image of a successful integration. Finally, in 2001 he was granted French citizenship. Paradoxically enough this happened right at the moment when Kamel was in one of the Islamist’s training camps somewhere in Afghanistan.³⁹ This one and many other similar stories made European and national authorities consider more carefully the issue of Muslim integration into the western societies.

Like the other migrants, Muslims tend to come from the poor, rural areas. Mostly they are ill-educated, they speak the language of the wider society either poorly or not at all, so they find it difficult to get jobs, they huddle in poor districts and have gloomy prospects for future. “For all these reasons they tend to withdraw into their own world, which is relatively easy, since their numbers are great enough to enable them to form a

³⁶ - Vertigans S., Sutton P., Globalisation Theory and Islamic Praxis, Global Society, Vol.16, No. 1. 2002, p. 31

³⁷ - Roberto Aliboni, The European Union and Mediterranean Security, Europe-The Mediterranean-Russia: perception of strategies, Moscow, 1998, p. 178

³⁸ - Olga Yu. Potemkina, From the Barcelona Declaration to the Amsterdam Treaty: changing of the EU Immigration Policy, Europe-The Mediterranean-Russia: perception of strategies, Moscow, 1998, p. 166

³⁹ - Pelletier E., Pontaut J-M., Les islamistes indésirables, L’Express, 1/8/2002, p. 12

fairly self-sufficient, self-contained community”.⁴⁰ Left to their own devices certain local ethnic and religious communes have been slowly turning into a kind of “ghettos”, hardly controlled by the police and avoided by local citizens even in daylight. Strictly speaking it is no wonder that in many so-called “ghettos” Sharia Law tends to prevail over the laws of a host country.

It is an open secret that Muslim minorities perpetuate strong links with their homeland and naturally try to introduce Islamic values and way of life on the European land. Moreover, some brought their feudalism with them and also the loyalty to the clan associated with it. This means that today an extended family of up to 500 people may vote as one. Another factor is arranged and occasionally forced marriages that help to constitute the “parallel society”.

Though numerous efforts with respect to their integration have been made both on European and national level they could not hamper the process of further “encapsulation” of Muslim community. Perhaps, this “state in the state” structure is the most alarming tendency as many believe it threatens to undermine the national sovereignty of the European states. One more problem presents the demographic shift towards an unintegrated and increasingly vocal Muslim minority.

Various special programmes and projects designed to facilitate successful minority’s integration have already been launched by local authorities. The challenge is that they’ve got to compete now with a network of Muslim welfare organisations and Islamic cultural centres that exist in Europe and the mosques in which Europe’s Muslims worship. The only difference is that these organisations have other aims. Nothing perpetuates homeland links as worryingly as they do. This does not necessarily mean that they preach violence there but they are likely to teach that integration into western societies is a treason under Islam.⁴¹

⁴⁰ - Europe’s Muslims, The Economist, August 10th 2002, p. 11

⁴¹ - Dim drums throbbing in the hills half heard, Special report, Muslims in the Western Europe, The Economist, August 10th 2002, p. 22

It ought to be pointed out that many Islamic organisations perform vital tasks neglected by the others.

“We do the grass-root job the government can’t...”⁴²

Obviously if politicians fail to deal with domestic issues and provide viable solutions to acute problems, there are plenty of other organisations and various extreme groups ready to pick them up. Perhaps, that is where Islamism managed to elbow its way.

Surely the true key to success hardly lies within the radical dogmas of Islamism. Actually only a few are aware of them, others are seduced by more down-to-earth things. The popularity of Islamists could be explained by their heavy on grass roots organisation. Their parties are in close touch with the neighbourhood and are closely attuned to local interests. Many Islamist parties run local social welfare programmes independently of governments and provide social services such as clinics, especially for women, housing for students who have come from the village to the big city, recreation facilities for the youth, legal advice, educational help and other forms of social assistance. “These activities – often far more responsive than the state to social needs in the neighbourhood – are generally funded from religious donations or from large Islamist-run banks and business. As a result Islamists prove to be closer to the needs of poorer neighbourhoods than their political rivals”.⁴³ The strength of Islamism is shaped not only by its Islamic discourses and rhetoric, but also by its social components and political programmes.

Among the majority of European immigrants disaffected young European Muslims are believed to be most vulnerable to Islamist certainties. “If ten years ago young people coming from Islamic countries hardly put any emphasis on their Muslim origins, today their reference to Islam is omnipresent”.⁴⁴ Islamist dogmas easily seduce them. Which is relatively easy due to their poor knowledge of Islam.

A fundamental problem with the teaching of Islam is that the Koran is written in ancient Arabic and is often learnt parrot fashion in the same language, with no translation or historical context given. Practitioners as well non-practitioners sometimes confuse

⁴² - An official of the Muslim Welfare House, Paris, The war of the headscarves, Special report, from the Economist print edition, February 5th 2004, www.economist.com

⁴³ - Xing Li, Dichotomies and Paradoxes: the West and Islam, Global Society, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2002, p. 416

⁴⁴ - Thioly B., Vingt ans apres la Marche des beurs, L’Express, 20/11/2003, p.31

ancestral culture with religion or unquestionably recite texts from the Koran without knowing what it means.

Still one should clearly realise that to a larger extent Muslim cultural and welfare organisations do work properly. Most do good work, organising programmes for women about health care or child welfare. They win prizes for their anti-drug activities. What's more important they are much closer to the needs of the Muslim community as they are run by those living in the community. What makes European authorities uneasy about them is the fact that what is taught by their imams, both in the mosque and in the *madrassa* that is generally attached, is often unknown to outsiders.

In this respect national governments admit they should give priority to the financial part of the problem. Europe's imams are usually sent and paid for by the governments of Muslim countries. Secular Turkey sends imams and provides Islamic lessons for children in Germany. Morocco and Algeria do the same in France.

Imams spring up spontaneously, sometimes out of nowhere, supported by some devotees and financed usually from North Africa, the Middle East or Asia. Taking into consideration this fact it is not surprising that fundamentalist imams are not rare in the Muslim religious quarters in Europe. Still a fear of extremism is not confined to non-Muslims only. Muslim imams also express their fear of fundamentalists. Like many others they believe it essential that imams should be trained in Europe, not in the Middle East, the Maghreb, Pakistan or Turkey.

*“Muslims must become immunised against outside radicalisation”.*⁴⁵

The national government is expected to take certain actions to make sure the financial flows whether from inside Europe or from abroad do not serve to nourish radicalism or harbour would-be terrorists in the Muslim religious centres throughout Europe. More emphasis should be given to training of European imams, whose lack of knowledge frequently stems from the lack of public and state control with regard to the

⁴⁵ - Ghoul Moulay , imam in Marseilles, Dim drums throbbing in the hills half heard, Special report, Muslims in the Western Europe, The Economist, August 10th 2002, p. 24

issue. Otherwise how can it be possibly explained that “70% of imams in France are self-proclaimed”?⁴⁶

Of course comprehensive Europe-wide measures might have proved to be far more beneficial. A partial communitarization of the third pillar (asylum and immigration policy, joint rules for checks at external borders and minorities’ integration) was proposed again and again as an instrument for improving the situation. But the differences in the Member States positions over the issues which could be gradually communitarized were so significant and their fears of losing the sovereignty in elaborating the immigration policy, for instance, were so strong that they have developed into a serious obstacle in the way of cooperation.

It seems incredible that the decisions regulating the rules of the new minorities’ insertion, very sensitive and tightly linked to nationalism and nationalistic movements might be taken at the level of Community. Here are the words of a senior Brussel-based diplomat, which explain why the debates concerning the issue are estimated as one of most arduous. “Third pillar issues touch upon the core of statehood. If you fight for majority voting on this, you battle against the whole weight of tradition and historical habit”.⁴⁷

It highly doubtful that the Member States will harmonise the immigration policy with regard to the legal resident immigrant’s integration or so-called “new ethnic groups” or new minorities” in the nearest future. Moreover Europe-wide harmonisation of the integration process is frequently considered as rather utopian if not unnecessary. Historically every European country has worked out its own *national* approach towards minorities’ insertion. Interfering within this delicate sphere would hinder rather than facilitate the process.

⁴⁶ - Dim drums throbbing in the hills half heard, Special report, Muslims in the Western Europe, The Economist, August 10th 2002, p. 24

⁴⁷ - Olga Yu. Potemkina, From the Barcelona Declaration to the Amsterdam Treaty: changing of the EU Immigration Policy, Europe-The Mediterranean-Russia: perception of strategies, Moscow, 1998, p. 171

*"We do not intend to decide by directive the numbers of immigrants that our economies and societies are prepared to absorb... Only member states, together with their civil societies and local authorities, know how much their societies are capable of integrating."*⁴⁸

So, rightly or wrongly, up to the present moment every European State choose its own way to deal with illegal immigration or integration of immigrants into their society.

Part III (Concluding remarks)

As is known a series of events - from the worldwide Islamic revival of the 1970s to the 11 September 2001 attacks against America - has fuelled the fear that Islam and the West are on a collision course.

*"There's no getting away from it. Islam and the West view one another with mistrust and suspicion."*⁴⁹

The outbreak of "islamophobia" led to debates whether Islam is compatible with modernity at all. Yet there are millions of Muslims all over the world living in the most modern cities and working in technological fields. Obviously, these Muslims have found a way to reconcile their faith with modernity. Clearly illegal immigration remains a problem. Cultural differences cannot always be easily reconciled. But according to many experts the rise of the far right rests upon a fundamental paradox: immigration, far from destroying European societies, could ultimately be their saviour.⁵⁰

The main point here is that European populations are ageing. Birth rates in European countries are falling. Substantial levels of immigration will be required in order to maintain the population levels of most developed countries over the next 50 years,

⁴⁸ - Antonio Vitorino, European Commissioner, Lungescu O., Europe's immigration vision 2001/07/11, www.bbc.com

⁴⁹ - Hardy R., Islam and the West: Bridging the divide, 2003/08/04, www.bbc.com

⁵⁰ - Marcus J., Analysis: The immigration message, 2002/05/07, www.bbc.com

according to a new United Nations report. It finds that in Japan and virtually all European countries populations will decline, whilst the average person will get older.

For instance, Italy is expected to register the largest decline, losing more than a quarter of its population, whilst the average Italian will be 53 years old in 2050, compared to only 41 years of age now.⁵¹

The only way for such countries to maintain their populations, the report suggests, will be to take in substantial numbers of immigrants. The prognosis made by the European Commission shows that the West European population will have decreased from 320 million in 1990 to 270 by 2025 while that of the Northern Africa will grow respectively from 200 million to 370.⁵²

Not only will the overall level of the population in most rich countries fall but so will the ratio between those of working age and those expecting to retire. The UN says that without immigration, richer countries might have to consider increasing the upper working limit to 75 years of age in order to maintain their present levels of pension and welfare support.⁵³

*“An ageing and shrinking population needs goods and services and somebody has to produce the goods and has to provide the services”.*⁵⁴

Clearly immigrants form an important part of the labour force in many of the world's most industrialised countries. While many countries are trying to limit the number of asylum seekers permanently settled on their shores, they are simultaneously trying to increase the number of people with specific skills and high levels of education whom they want to encourage to move there.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) there is a renewed interest in the recruitment of new immigrant workers in these

⁵¹ - Devenport M., Stark choice over immigration. Populations are getting older in many countries, 2000/03/21, www.bbc.com

⁵² - Olga Yu. Potemkina, From the Barcelona Declaration to the Amsterdam Treaty: changing of the EU Immigration Policy, Europe-The Mediterranean-Russia: perception of strategies, Moscow, 1998, p. 166

⁵³ - Devenport M., Stark choice over immigration. Populations are getting older in many countries, 2000/03/21, www.bbc.com

⁵⁴ - Rainer Muenz, Immigration Commission, Germany's immigration revolution, 2001/07/04, www.bbc.com

countries, partly explained by their ageing populations. Many industrialised countries are seeking to attract highly-skilled foreign workers.

Rich countries are increasingly competing to recruit highly skilled immigrants to meet labour shortages in key industries like IT.

According to Professor John Salt of University College London's Migration Research Unit, competition between countries over attracting skilled migrants has become more intense.⁵⁵ Shortage of key public sector professionals has led to an explosion in the recruitment of doctors, nurses and teachers, and here Britain leads Europe and probably the world. Some countries have created special immigration schemes to attract them, competing with existing schemes that have existed for some years in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. "In a new policy paper on immigration, integration and employment, Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner, Anna Diamantopoulou, and Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner, Antonio Vitorino, predict that unless more effective policies are developed to welcome the migrants the EU needs, the immigrants will not be able to fulfil their potential nor make their full contribution to economic development".⁵⁶ This means that the EU must not only do better to ensure their full participation into the labour market, but also in social, cultural and civic life. At the same time the European Union is making new efforts to stop the influx of illegal immigrants, and work out common immigration policies to satisfy the real economic need for immigrant labour.

Leaving the economic factor aside one has to bear in mind a fact that immigration has always been a force of history.

"In today's discussions about migration and its consequences many politicians and others seem to suffer from severe amnesia. Migration is frequently labelled as a recent phenomenon. There are, however, few people in the world who need to go back further than three generations in their family tree to stumble upon a migrating ancestor".⁵⁷

⁵⁵ - Schifferes S., Rich countries woo highly skilled migrants , 2004/03/24, www.bbc.com

⁵⁶ - The European Commission calls on the European Union Member States to step up their efforts to integrate immigrants, www.europa.eu.int

⁵⁷ - Dr Marlou Schrover, History Department, Leiden University, Netherlands, Migration: A historical perspective, 2004/03/23, www.bbc.com

The first step is to see migration for what it is, rather than through the prejudiced eyes of some headline writers that go with the flow of common opinion. People tend to be prejudiced against mass immigration in general and immigrants in particular. But one should avoid thinking stereotypically. Historically, the net effect of migration has been a benign one. "Where would America be without the unparalleled movement of Irish people in the mid-to-late 19th Century? Where would modern Australia be if it had continued to rely solely on the flow of people from the "mother" country. Only the bigots there still believe that immigrants have contributed nothing".⁵⁸

They introduced new foods, which within one generation became staple foods of the receiving society. Migrants brought techniques from one country to another, encouraged trade through their contacts and opened up new markets. One need not search deep in the history to find some vivid examples.

For instance, with the German migrants of the 19th Century the Christmas tree - considered to be very German, pagan and Catholic at the same time - became popular world-wide and entered into the households of people who can claim no German ancestry. Migrating English engineers at the end of the 19th Century introduced football to the European continent, and within one generation this sport stopped being typically British.

As for the rise of xenophobia and racism one has to bear in mind the fact that it has always accompanied immigration waves. Actually all foreigners were officially discriminated against. Foreigners had to pay fees before they were allowed to settle in a town, and had to pay another fee before they were allowed to join the guilds, and to work in a certain profession. Furthermore, cities threw up barriers for people of a certain faith. Some regions discriminated Catholics, others Protestants, almost all discriminated Jews. Moreover most migrants were looked upon with fear. At the start of the 19th Century, when the French influence swept over Europe, it was feared that French manners would weaken the spines of the young men of other nations. Later when the German unification kicked off Europe was overwhelmed by widespread waves of Prusso-phobia. Pleas were made to restrict further immigration of Germans to countries like Denmark, France and the Netherlands, and to evict those already present. Each time new groups of migrants

⁵⁸ - Alagiah G., Migration: 'A force of history', 2004/03/24, www.bbc.com

arrived, they were considered even more problematic and different than their predecessors.

It seems the biggest motive is fear of the changes that usually comes with uncontrolled immigration.⁵⁹ First and foremost fear of migrants rests upon the fear of change to culture. Culture is, however, not a fixed concept. Cultures change continuously over time. Actually the cultures as we know them today are the result of centuries of migration.⁶⁰

Even the fears of local authorities and local citizens that immigrants tend to be socially encapsulated are more or less natural. Still this fear is exaggerated. Newcomers were always set apart in some sense.

Of course the crucial mass of the Muslim immigrant communities, which makes it easier for individuals to survive unintegrated, is a serious impediment. At present moment unintegrated ethnic communities are believed to be the main push factor of social tensions. But conflict is natural and inevitable, and the only way to minimise it is to iron out the extreme elements of all religions, and find the common ground where they can all thrive.

Yet some aspects of Islam do reinforce the isolation of Muslims in Western Europe.

The main obstacle western societies stumble over when dealing with the integration of Muslim immigrants is that Islam is not a religion in the limited sense of the word, but it is rather a complete and comprehensive code of life and a culture producing factor. The islamic world is basically different from the rest of the world and from the West in particular. «Muslim culture profits from all available sources, local and international, but its unique characteristic is that it has grown from the foundation of the Quran and Sunnah».⁶¹

What we see nowadays in the western countries is the marginalisation of the role of religion. Today in the West religion is more associated with historical and cultural

⁵⁹ - William Horsley, Immigration fears boost Europe's right, 2002/05/16, www.bbc.com

⁶⁰ - Dr Marlou Schrover, History Department, Leiden University, Netherlands, Migration: A historical perspective, 2004/03/23, www.bbc.com

identity and has less to do with development and progress. It is firmly believed that only scientific knowledge, economic development and technological progress are related to the advancement of the society. Moreover, certain scholars believe that Western Civilisation witnesses «the rise of a new and fundamentally deformed religion – *expressive individualism* – the glorification neither of God nor of country but of *self*». ⁶²

However many religions, including Islam, in other parts of the world do not share such approach. In their understanding religion is far from being only a personal matter and that the actions are separate from beliefs. «Unlike Christianity Islam has never limited itself to the realm of personal faith and private life. Rather, it was concerned with politics and governance from the very beginning in seeking the just society and political order». ⁶³ Philosophically, Islam considers religion integral to the state and society.

Given this fact it would be idle to pretend that Muslim religious visions do not present some problems in the democratic West, yet one should avoid demonising the issue. «Islam does, of course, impose certain obligations and zealots say they include outright hostility to the tenets of western society». ⁶⁴ But that is not the point, and the vast majority of Muslims find they can follow their religion in the West without serious difficulty. When speaking of Islam one need to differentiate between political Islam, cultural Islam and true Islam. Their cultural and national background, which vary enormously, may play a bigger part in their ability to integrate than their religion.

So, in one respect, it is the strength of Islam, as a religion, that brings several benefits. Muslims are generally good, law-abiding citizens, they tend to have strong family values. But Islam is religion that is readily open to extremist distortion, as all religions are in some extent. That is why when tackling the issue of Muslim integration and fulfilling the demands of ethnic and religious minorities Western authorities should distinguish between religious radicalism – Islamism (that has to do more with politics than religion itself) and Islam.

⁶¹ - S. Vertigans, P. Sutton, Globalisation Theory and Islamic Praxis, Global Society, Vol.16, No. 1. 2002, p. 40

⁶² - Xing Li, Dichotomies and Paradoxes: the West and Islam, Global Society, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2002, p. 409

⁶³ - *ibid*, p. 410

⁶⁴ - Europe's Muslims, The Economist, August 10th 2002, p. 11

*“It is not normal that islamistes eventually obtain so much in the host countries, while in the countries of their origin they are rightly tracked down for similar activities”.*⁶⁵

In this respect European governments should build sensible and prompt politics in order to provide peace and stability in the region and fight racism and xenophobia. Fearing and demonising other groups, a growing belief that they want to set themselves aside, above and different from the others is the first step toward the intolerance and closed minded idealism that leads to injustice, repression and finally violence. Of course in order to stop bigotry, racism and planned segregation, this politics should begin at grass roots levels as mutual understanding – the prerequisite of a successful ethnic or religious politics - can be hindered by the prejudices we harbour in our minds. Then perhaps intolerance would evaporate and Islam would be seen a wonderful and truly peaceful religion with great leaders and potential. But one needs to separate fact from fiction in order to understand the actual state of things.

Unfortunately as humans we seek to highlight the few differences rather than the many similarities. And in many cases this thinking is promoted by politicians and clergy on all sides who prefer a "divide and rule" approach, in order to keep their agendas alive. «Government itself sometimes encourages negative images of immigration and uses refugees or immigrants as a scapegoat for its failed policies”.⁶⁶ If only we all had the resolve, desire and wisdom to seek to understand our own and the others' faith better.

* * *

Nowadays the local paper death announcements speak of “Pierre” and “Charle”; the birth are of “Moussa” and “Fatih”.⁶⁷ These simple indices of the changing face of Europe indicate that Islam has its place here now. Whether we like it or not this evolution is irreversible. Of course the major difference of the present immigration wave from many others that flooded Europe in the past is connected with its Islamic nature. Since the Pope Urban II’s sermon in Clermont (1095) which blessed the Crusades the Christian

⁶⁵ - Samia Labidi, Dossier, La laicite face a l’Islam, L’Express, 18/9/2002, p. 52

⁶⁶ - Immigrants are political scapegoats, 2002/05/20, www.bbc.com

⁶⁷ - The war of the headscarves, Feb 5th 2004, Economist.com

and Muslim world have always been in a clash. Even in today's globalised world the memory of the past feud is slow to die. But this is a thing of the past.

Not cultural differences but trivial lack of mutual understanding generates cultural tension inside the host countries, which tend to translate even into international tensions. "Internationally, problems stemming from immigration tend to give cultural factors in undesired weight and lend credibility to doctrines like "clash of civilisations".⁶⁸ Perhaps, that is where a thrilling myth of unprecedented threat to the European Civilisation stems from. History needs time to unravel it. By now immigration presents European societies with thorny adjustments and cultural dilemmas.

But as Antonio Vitorino put it immigration is neither a problem nor a solution of numerous European problems "it is a reality that has to be properly managed".⁶⁹

The key to success in today's time is creating a vibrant multicultural environment. Differences can only be reconciled through mutual acceptance. Cooperation in the areas of culture and civilisation becomes an important instrument bringing people closer to each other, one of the prerequisites for effective development of integration process. "The final objective of those activities is the creation of a single European cultural space, a single European communality, while preserving in full cultural identity of countries and regions – it is this kind of unification that is regarded as the most durable and stable foundation of a "Big Europe".⁷⁰

⁶⁸ - Roberto Aliboni, *The European Union and Mediterranean Security, Europe-The Mediterranean-Russia: perception of strategies*, Moscow, 1998, p. 178

⁶⁹ - Antonio Vitorino, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Lungescu O., *Europe's immigration vision*, 2001/07/11, www.bbc.com

⁷⁰ - Ludmila V. Peskova, *Culture in Euro-Mediterranean co-operation, Europe-The Mediterranean-Russia: perception of strategies*, Moscow, 1998, p.164

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