

for 1

A European Islam policy and Islam in Europe

Islam has been increasingly used as an explanation for social, cultural, economic and political conflicts. This applies to relations between Europe and its Muslim neighbours, between North and South and also to divisions within many Muslim states.

As examples we might recall how Willy Claes, the former Secretary-General of NATO, tried to give NATO a new role by depicting what he termed Islamic fundamentalism as a greater threat to Europe than Communism. Three years ago, in an article which appeared in Foreign Affairs, Samuel Huntington, Professor at Harvard, predicted an imminent "clash of civilizations" between the Western world and its Muslim neighbourhood.

The growing gap between North and South, between "the haves and the have-nots", tends to lend weight to this argument. Islam could serve as a rallying cry, focusing the bitterness of the Third World against what is regarded as Western dominance over the economic and political order after the Cold War. As the non-aligned movement becomes less relevant, Islam is increasingly emerging as the strongest political force in the Third World. Perhaps radical Islamic movements

will be linked up with ^{the} other radical groups, and maybe they will cooperate with them, adopting the motto "my enemy's enemy is my friend".

From a Western perspective, therefore, the security policy and political agendas of the Third World and Islam would appear to be coinciding to an increasing extent.

In many parts of the world, Muslims currently feel themselves to be besieged and cornered by the Western world. They see themselves as victims of military aggression in Iraq, Libya, Lebanon and Iran, they encounter Israeli soldiers in the occupied territories and in Lebanon, they are on the losing side in wars which have been given religious motives in Bosnia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Chechnya, and they are squeezed by Hindu sectarianism in Kashmir.

In addition, Muslims in the United States and Europe feel themselves to be discredited, on probation and under suspicion on the grounds of their religious beliefs; this feeling was confirmed when the first accusations regarding the motives behind the Oklahoma City bombing a year ago were more or less automatically targeted at Muslims and Islam.

The many internal conflicts and domestic antagonisms in the Muslim world are adding to the political instability. The deterioration in the political and economic situation gives the Islamic movements increasing political scope.

for I

We might say that the Islamic movements have acquired a "monopoly by default". In many states, they often constitute the only credible and effective genuine opposition to the regime in power, since all official political opposition is banned and, furthermore, has been physically eliminated in many cases.

Even in parts of the Muslim world which are characterized by rapid economic and social development, Islam will prove attractive to those who feel that they have lost their bearings and long for what used to be firm frames of reference.

As a result, if political systems in the Muslim world are not opened up to allow broader ideological competition, the Islamic movements will be the sole heirs when the existing regimes collapse.

In political terms, however, Islam is not a cohesive ideology which is just waiting to be implemented. Instead, it might be characterized as several different visions of how society should be arranged so as to meet the needs of its citizens in a better manner and of the form that politics should take. Like nationalism, Islam also lacks a cohesive political agenda which offers concrete solutions for specific problems. Instead, Islamic political ideology is often a question of vague references to Islamic law.

Few Islamic movements currently appear to be capable of

modernizing Islamic principles so that they can be applied in today's society, complying with international norms as regards human rights, minority questions and treatment of women.

Political Islam is not completely static, however, blindly trying to turn the clock back to the age of the Prophet. Political views and approaches to political action cover a broad spectrum, ranging from democratic reformists to radical activists who advocate violence and reactionaries who have no concrete vision of society.

As a political phenomenon, as it acquires new experience, Islam will also develop a greater awareness of the political difficulties and a fuller understanding of Western political systems and institutions, political theories and fundamental democratic values.

Today, when Islamic tendencies are gaining strength, the Western world has two political alternatives for action.

One is to influence and encourage Muslim states to follow the path of political pluralism and enter into a dialogue with "moderate" Islamic movements. The other is to try to pursue a "containment" policy.

The latter alternative - trying to stop Islamic movements by supporting the regimes which are oppressing them - would undoubtedly prove much more difficult than the struggle

against Communism.

Challenging an ideology based on an unsuccessful economic system is one thing, but demonizing and fighting a culture and a faith which has been in existence for almost fifteen hundred years is quite a different matter. Furthermore, the regimes which the Western world would have to support in this case could not be regarded as natural allies. It is politicians like Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Hafez al Assad in Syria and Muammar Qadhafi in Libya who are the most determined opponents of the Islamic movements. These are rooted in serious and deep-seated political, social and economic problems which will not be solved by repression.

If the West encourages the existing regimes to resist fundamentalist tendencies on the grounds that, in any event, fundamentalism is harmful to our interests, there would be a risk that we would ignore or not be sufficiently sensitive to tendencies and trends which may be genuinely democratic and which would therefore favour our long-term interests. A policy of this nature would also lead to fully justified accusations of a hypocritical attitude and approach to democratic ideals.

As already mentioned, the fact that Islam has been excluded from the political process has contributed to polarization and radicalization. One aspect of our policy should therefore be to encourage the current regimes to bring Islamic movements and groups which are not inclined to violence into this process. This would "social-democratize" them, to use an expression coined by Olivier Roy, encouraging them to move more rapidly in the direction of moderation and a pragmatic policy which aims at dealing with current problems.

As a result, we should endeavour to maintain a dialogue with "moderate" Islamic movements.

The arguments against this approach which are commonly cited - both in the West and in the Muslim world - are that the fundamentalists would exploit it to "kidnap democracy", applying the motto "one man, one vote, one time". And in fact the parliamentary elections in Algeria in December 1991 demonstrated that a liberalization of the political system involves a risk that strong forces will emerge whose belief in democracy is by no means unambiguous. Despite all the rhetoric about the need for pluralism, political reform and democratic systems, the combination of Islam and democracy seems to be the source of just as much anxiety amongst Western governments as amongst the despots and authoritarian regimes of the Muslim world.

So far, however, Islamic fundamentalism has threatened

family dynasties and one party states rather than liberal democracies. As a result, the current alternatives to Islamic government are often conservative monarchies or military regimes with no democratic basis, dictatorships disguised by pan-Arab or Islamic rhetoric, or formal democracies which, in reality are one-party systems with a cosmetic facade of democracy.

If the Western world made it completely clear, right from the start, that it accepted the results of democratic elections, no matter who came out on top, it would then be easier to adopt a firm position when democratically-elected Islamic governments abused their power. This would mean that criticism could not be dismissed as an expression of anti-Islamism. The question of Islam's compatibility with democracy could have been tested in Algeria. For far too many people in the Muslim world, the Algerian elections have instead to some extent become a test case for Western attitudes to Islam and democracy. The Western world's reaction to the military coup might be described as passive - or perhaps it was even an expression of tacit approval.

A dialogue would be even more important since the prospects of the marginalization of the religious movements in the short term as a result of economic and social reforms which benefit broad groups in society are not particularly good. Nonetheless, one of the objectives for an Islamic policy must be to contribute to reforms in the economic and social area, and hence European assistance should be employed to

promote and exert pressure in favour of economic and social reform.

States such as Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Turkey, which are close to Europe, will play a key role in establishing a stable relationship between Europe and the Muslim world. As a result, high priority must be given to support for social and economic development in these states.

Assistance and a political dialogue can never be of more than marginal importance, however. The kind of economic development which is required to marginalize the fundamentalist groups assumes, in its turn, that European markets will be opened up. The emphasis must therefore be on "trade not aid", and this applies in particular to the EU Mediterranean policy. A policy of this nature is also essential if it is to be possible to control immigration pressures.

Religious and cultural divisions between Islam and Christianity can be seen from the Far East to the Mediterranean, and in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Balkans. These areas are potential trouble spots but, at the same time, it should be noted that the most serious rifts are between Islam and the Orthodox churches - there are often close links between local nationalism and Orthodox Christianity.

Furthermore, antagonism between the West and the Muslim

world tends to be on functional rather than geographical lines. The problems may, however, accumulate and become consolidated to such an extent that Huntington's picture of the clash of civilizations gains credibility. This, in its turn, could be exploited by the extremists on both sides. This makes specific, concrete problems more difficult to solve since they assume an ideological disguise which blows them up out of all proportion and hides the possibility of achieving a negotiated solution.

We must therefore keep the question of Islam and the concrete issues separate - we must "de-Islamize" them. As a result, the problems which exist should not be presented as a cultural confrontation with Islam. Bilateral differences with Islamic countries must not be described in Islamic terms unless there is direct evidence that Islam is causing the problem. Instead, criticism of the relevant phenomena per se must be presented in precise terms - for example criticism of human rights violations or support for international terrorist activities - matters which we all condemn, irrespective of the religious or cultural background of the perpetrators.

for I

If a fundamentalist Islam is presented as the source of all evil, this will strengthen such movements since marginalized and dissatisfied groups will get the impression^{ur} that the fundamentalists must be on the right track if they can scare and shake the Western world to such an extent.

If Islamic groups come to power, the EU must agree on certain minimum conditions which must be fulfilled if bilateral relations are to be maintained. These conditions should be linked to human rights and the norms for relations between countries. This must be the primary guiding principle, not the domestic Islamic-based legislation which regimes of this nature might introduce.

Islam is a central factor in several explosive national and ethnic conflicts - in Bosnia, the West Bank and Gaza, Cyprus, Kashmir, Nagorno-Karabach and Southern Sudan. The way in which the Western world reacts to and intervenes in such conflicts will be reflected in our relationships in a broader sense. Cooperation with Muslim states in peace-keeping operations within and outside the Muslim world may be one element in a confidence-building policy.

Despite the continuous expansion of contacts and growing interdependence, there is also increasing suspicion and misunderstanding between the Muslim world and Europe. Countering the hostile and threatening scenarios produced on both sides will become an increasingly important aspect of a European Islamic policy. As a result, there must also be a

greater focus than in the past on confidence-building measures in the cultural area which was one of the aims of the Conference on Relations between Europe and "the Muslim World and on the Positions of Muslims in Europe" which was held in Stockholm last June on the initiative of the Swedish Foreign Minister and which will have a follow up in Jordan now in June. These conferences should not just be a one-off events but followed up and given a broader content. Immigration and integration policies will become an increasingly important components in a European Islamic policy. Only a depoliticized and liberal Islam can be integrated into Europe, and an integration of this nature is only possible if it runs parallel with an economic and social integration. If this is successful, the Islamic religious communities may become bridges between Europe and their countries of origin.

Racism, intolerance and a narrow nationalism are currently gaining strength throughout Europe, in reaction to a level of immigration which is insignificant compared with what we are likely to encounter in the future. These problems are already so serious that they can only be solved by joint European endeavours and a consistent European immigration and refugee policy. There are several questions which need to be faced.

To what extent should European countries be opened up to non-European immigration, including the reception of refugees?

What religious, cultural and linguistic elements in the identity of immigrants are to be furthered, tolerated or resisted? Multiculturalism has become a prestigious concept, but it has a broad spectrum of meanings, ranging from the question of whether the genital mutilation^{UK} of girls should be tolerated or whether girls should be allowed to wear veils in schools, to the issue of home-language training and multicultural curricula.

One essential prerequisite for successful integration is that we build up our knowledge of the diversity of Islam and the varied nature of Muslim immigration. Now that the red peril has disappeared, we are urged to believe that it has been replaced by a green Muslim threat. There is clearly a risk that this image will be exploited to reinforce a feeling of European unity - something which is now at a low ebb in all West European states after the euphoric years of the late 1980's. In view of the fact that there are already more than 15 million immigrants with a Muslim background in the European Union - a number acceding that of the Scandinavian members - and that immigration from the Muslim world is going to continue, we must rid ourselves of this false negative scenario as soon as possible - a scenario which is often depicted in terms of uniform, fanatical Muslim masses preparing to storm the bastions of the West's welfare system under green banners of Islam, with scimitars in one hand and the Koran in the other.

The Muslims in Europe are not a featureless Third World mob, but consist of people from all classes in society and

with varying degrees of religiosity. The majority not only have a relaxed relationship to religion but are in fact more interested in worldly pleasures than many European puritans. Only a minority of Muslims are organized members of a religious or political community.

As a result, Europe is not currently facing the threat of a fundamentalist fifth column of Muslim immigrants. Instead, Islam's internal splits are clearly reflected in the Diaspora. Muslims in Europe are not only divided by their different languages, cultures and skin colouring, but also by the various branches and sects of Islam which, in addition, are often in bitter competition with each other for Islamic souls. Furthermore, we must also take political antagonisms into account, for example between Kurdish and Turkish immigrants. Perhaps the greatest problem currently faced by Muslim immigrants is that their diversity has meant that they often lack a common spokesman or a representative organization which can present their case.

A policy designed to facilitate the integration of Muslim immigrant groups must be based on the following prerequisites.

- * There are already large Muslim communities in most West-European states. These communities will not only expand but they will also demand greater political influence as increasing numbers of Muslims become naturalized citizens and become enfranchised in their new home countries.

- * Muslims are not as easy to integrate and not as willing

14

to allow themselves to be integrated as previous immigrant groups. An Islamic identity encompasses customs and traditions which deviate from those which are regarded as normal in the societies in which many Muslims are now living. Demands will be made for special rights and for a special status, in addition to the entitlements enjoyed by the native population. In many cases, these demands will not only be difficult to satisfy, but also impossible, and this will lead to tension.

* Undesirable and undemocratic political tendencies in their countries of origin may be channelled into their new home countries by Muslim communities. Both the governments of Muslim states and the various sects and organizations will attempt to exploit the immigrants for their own purposes.

In the light of these factors, what is the best way to integrate Muslim immigrants?

Although Jews and Christians are accepted as "peoples of the book", Islam has always been a dominant and hegemonistic religion in historical terms. In Europe, Muslims must learn to live as a minority and to accept the fundamental pillars of modern European societies, that is to say pluralism and a secular social system characterized by tolerance of people with a different political or religious viewpoint.

The objective must be integration which is as rapid as possible, taking into account and respecting those who,

while respecting our values, wish to maintain their own cultural and religious identity. Taking into account special religious features must not, however, extend to excusing pupils from aspects of their education which do not suit their parents. Just as a full education in one's own religion must be regarded as a private matter, immigrants must also take responsibility for home-language training - something which is currently hindering integration. Muslims must themselves become active in working for young people, so as to give a generation which has grown up in Europe a cultural background of their own while, at the same time, integrating them socially into their new environment. The Muslim communities must cooperate with each other and avoid fighting out their theological disputes openly on European territory.

As a result, a "domestic" leadership will have to emerge, thus permitting the elimination of the label attached to Islam as an alien and dangerous cult. This domestic leadership will not only consist of Muslims born in Europe, but perhaps also of native converts.

Most Muslims consider that they must comply with laws and regulations in their new home countries, but this willingness is undermined in many quarters by external appeals by organizations which prefer a "pure" Islam, without compromise. As a result, we must not tolerate the establishment of parallel political institutions, as is currently the case in Britain where there is a separate Muslim parliament. This is due to an excessively broad interpretation of the concept of multiculturalism or

perhaps, as in Sweden, a misguided general spirit of goodwill, sweetness and light, or simply flabbiness.

Furthermore, we must not be too easy-going in dealing with religious and political fanatics who utilize their exile in Europe for subversive activities directed against their home countries or for internal disputes. Under no circumstances should tolerance be extended to totalitarian views or ideas. While we should demonstrate sympathy for Islam as a religion and ensure that the prerequisites for the exercise of religion are as favourable as possible, we must also demonstrate firmness as regards compliance with our own laws. At the same time, we must beware of regarding all religious expressions as signs of fundamentalism, or unwillingness to adapt and to become integrated into Swedish society. A process of Islamization amongst immigrants is only dangerous if it comes into conflict with the norms of a pluralistic society and a democratic state. For many immigrants from Muslim countries, religion and a general sense of piety are one way of counteracting the feeling of rootlessness which they experience. Thus, religion may be a by-product of the break with their own cultural background and not necessarily a protest against the new society in which they are living. Hence, greater religiosity is not the same thing as suspicion and intolerance of a secularized European environment but may, instead, create an inner tranquillity which promotes tolerance and hence integration.

Individuals who devote themselves to preaching a doctrine of hatred directed against Europe and against Christianity,

and who abuse our pluralistic societies, must be dealt with firmly and rejected. But, at the same time, we must not regard radical Muslim groups as an expression of an overall campaign to attack the Western World from within. There is no such plan and, furthermore, there is no Muslim leadership capable of drawing up such a campaign. Antagonism and enmity between different sects are often stronger than hatred of the Western World. Apparently, only 6 per cent of the Arabs in France regularly visit a mosque and only a few of the 60-70,000 Muslims in Sweden who practise their religion are fundamentalists. As far as the vast majority are concerned, the cultural and identity-supportive aspects of their religion are the most important factors.

Only a depoliticized and liberal Islam can be integrated into Europe, and such an integration is only possible if it is paralleled by economic and social integration. In its turn, one prerequisite for a development of this kind is controlled immigration and a common European immigration policy designed to create a liberal and tolerant Islamic community in Europe. If this is to be achieved, those who are willing to become integrated must feel that they are welcome and that they belong here. The feeling of "where do I belong?" is one of the primary breeding grounds for fundamentalists who want to create and exploit a spiritual ghetto under the banner "you have no affinities either here or with your corrupt and morally decadent government in your home country - you have to fight against both of them".

If Muslim immigrants are to be able to feel that they belong, it is essential that:

- * Islam is recognized and regarded as a "domestic" religion. There is nothing which intrinsically indicates that a Muslim cannot be as good a Swede as a member of the Pentecostal Bretheren or an adherent of the Jewish faith, or that mosques cannot be as natural a feature of Swedish cities as churches have always been in Aleppo, Damascus, Mosul or Cairo.
- * Education in the Islamic faith is not only improved, but is made mandatory in our schools. The demonic factor needs to be eliminated on a mutual basis. Ignorance breeds prejudice and hatred. As a result, the media must also rectify the stereotyped and oversimplified view of Islam which is currently conveyed.
- * Society protects everyone who wants to be integrated into European society, but who is under threat and under pressure not only from local extremists and groups which are hostile to immigrants, but also from Muslim extremist groups.
- * Immigrants are given an opportunity to formulate and articulate their views and wishes.
- * We pursue development cooperation and foreign policies which are designed to reduce the pressure of immigration and to make immigration more manageable in human and political terms.

If immigrants are integrated in this way, the Islamic community in Europe can become a bridge between Europe and immigrants' countries of origin. "Euromuslims" will then be able to set an example, and transfer democratic approaches and liberal ideas and reforms to their native countries. This would enable a fruitful triangular relationship to develop between the Islamic communities, their native countries and their new home countries, since many people living in the Diaspora want to maintain close contacts with their origins.

On the other hand, if integration fails and immigrants with a Muslim background feel that they are subject to religious tutelage, forced into ghettos and socially marginalized, with continuing high rates of unemployment we will have to reckon with the emergence of underground fundamentalist Koran schools in our immigrant suburbs, and with teachers who urge their pupils to fight with all the means at their disposal against what they regard as an oppressive Swedish society.

Instead of a modern, tolerant "Euroislam" we will see a development of a "Ghettoislam", supported by fundamentalist forces in the Islamic world. Radical mullahs throughout Western Europe are currently attempting to exploit the psychological, cultural and material problems of Muslim immigrants for their own purposes, and politicians such as Jean-Marie Le Pen, Franz Schönhuber and Jörg Haider are giving them wind in their sails as a result of the polarization which they have advocated in France, Germany and Austria.

If developments move in this direction, we must reckon that militant Muslim organizations will also endeavour to pursue their struggle with the Western World - which they regard as the incarnation of all evil - in Europe.

In this case, a "holy war" can become a reality in Western Europe sooner than we suppose, not in the form of a military struggle between the West and the Islamic world or the clash of civilizations that Huntington has in mind but as a kind of permanent guerrilla warfare in the ghetto-suburbs of our major cities.

Ingmar Karlsson