

Muslims in Public Life Promoting Inclusion or Reinforcing Barriers?

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This conference is about Muslims in Europe – European Muslims, in other words it is about people. The following panel is about inclusion and barriers.

Let me open this panel with the following remarks:

Inclusion and barriers start in the minds of people. From this follows: we need nothing less than a change in perception, a change of minds, we need a true revolution in thought. Without this all individual action - may it be positive or negative - shall only remain piecemeal.

In ten points, based on the question “who includes whom into what” I would like to point out in which areas this revolution in thought is necessary:

Who:

- 1) We have to change how we look at ourselves: the UK and Germany are not monolithic. The UK consists of England, Scotland, Wales forming Great Britain and plus Ireland we get the United Kingdom. In Germany we have 16 states the different tribes of which love each other dearly: Rhine Landers love Westphalians, people from Baden adore people from Suebia, and Bavaria will soon have it first Minister President who is not catholic and from Upper Bavaria, but a protestant from Franconia.

- 2) We have to change how we think about ourselves: The UK and Germany are not static, over centuries people have moved from one place to the other, stayed or moved on – even Germany has a history of immigration. The truth is however that since there has not been any considerable mi-

gration for a long time, we do have troubles today to adjust to the supposedly “new “ phenomenon.

Whom:

- 3) We have to change how we look at immigration: Following a century old pattern new tribes are moving in now. In the case of the UK they are extended family mostly from the commonwealth, in the case of Germany they come from the other side of the Mediterranean, considered “Muslims, believers in Islam, in other words the enemy” by centuries of Christian history writing.
- 4) We have to change how we look at the new citizens: They come to look for a job, to have a better life for themselves and their families. They come as citizens of Turkey, Pakistan and other nations. They come as private believers, who quietly want to practise their religions in the way they consider it right. They do not come as religious refugees like the Jews expelled from Spain to the Balkans, like the Huguenots from Paris to Berlin and they do not come to create a theocratic state like the Pilgrim Fathers did in America.
- 5) We have to change how we judge the religion of Islam: It is the people of our public life, media and politician e. g. who by constantly warning of the dangers of Islam are turning these quiet believers into public Muslims. We have to eradicate the idea that Islam is an evil religion and that its message leads to evil deeds.

Into what?

- 6) If it is our aim to include the newly arrived, we must find an answer to the question “include into what”? I suggest that we aim to create an open society and to ensure by fostering inclusion that it is open to everybody. An

open society by definition does not exclude by enforcing barriers. (And I think this also corresponds with Michael Bird's call of last evening for an open Europe.)

- 7) In an open society there is private life and there is public life, public live meaning everything from the educational system to politics, but of course mainly the media. It is here that we need the most thorough revolution of thought and we have to decide between clear alternatives:
- 8) We have a choice to continue see the world in an antagonistic way like Pirenne did who says that Europe only could have come into existence, because of the Islamic threat. Or we can see the world with the eyes of Franco Cardini, who writes about continuous fights of one Muslim - Christian Coalition against another Muslim - Christian coalition – no word of a holy war there.
- 9) We have the choice to put a quarantine around those whom we think dangerous or we can include them into our discourse, trying to convince them by dialogue of our opinion. I would be very much interested in hearing about the practises and experiences of our distinguished guests in their home countries.
- 10) We have a choice to define European history as an exclusive exercise, in which Muslims and Islam have played no role at all. Or we can define the Mediterranean history as our common history to which all cultures have contributed and try to understand that our history is linked in a Mediterranean Double Helix.

Let me end with my favourite example of inclusion: My favourite museum, The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford is at this moment refurbishing its collection under the heading "Crossing Cultures - Crossing Times". I quote: "Never before has there been such an urgent need for the great

contribution of the Islamic art to world to be seen, appreciated and understood in the West.”

I invite now the members of the panel to share with us their specific information about best practises of inclusion and not so admirable examples of barriers. And of course I invite them to agree or disagree with my plea for a revolution in thought.