

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Building a bridge through dialogue

Archbishop Demetrios of America

Wilfried Martens

Egemen Bağış

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen

Rodi Kratsa

Thomas Hammarberg

Renate Sommer

Mario Mauro

Charles Tannock

Fiorello Provera

Sophia in 't Veld

Konrad Szymanski

Heiner Bielefeldt

Pieter Omtzigt

Grégor Puppinck

Sencer Ayata

Willy Fautré

Jay Sekulow

Amanda Paul

Nicolas Berger

Greg Austin

Andy Darmoo

Otmar Oehring

Emre Öktem

Robert Ellis

Mine Yildirim

George Readings

Francisco Jaime Quesado

Johny Messo





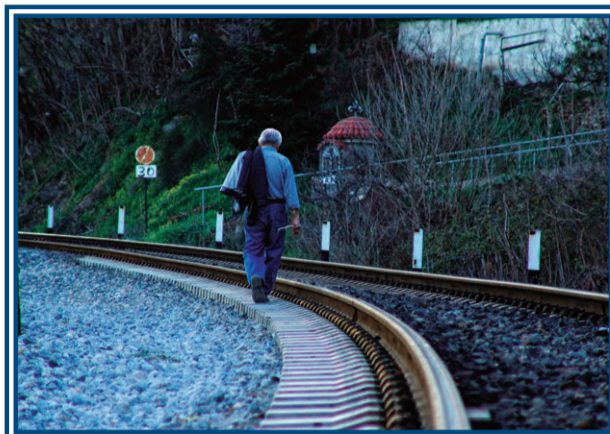
Let there not be darkness

by *Alexandros Koronakis*

Alexandros Koronakis is the Director of New Europe, and the Editor of New Europe's Religious Freedom Special Edition



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Let us not argue with one-another, on whether and which God said “Let there be light”, but rather agree that if we do not protect the fundamental rights of religious freedom, we will but remain in the dark.

With the holocaust, the crusades, massacres, genocide, burning people at the stake, terrorist attacks, and wars lasting from moments to generations, all in the name of religion, it is no wonder that local families, local communities, and even governments have often not been entirely impartial to different religions remaining sunk in a historical and contemporary darkness.

Freedom of religion is the absolute freedom; the freedom to choose the core of your being, the philosophy by which you live your life. Religious texts come into conflict with one another when it comes to defining the cosmos, its creation, its creator, the essence of life, the afterlife or lack thereof, and the guidelines through which we live our lives.

There can be many truths, or at least beliefs which we hold to be true. The insistence that there is but one absolute truth is the root of conflict.

But if history has taught us anything, it is that if we try, we can all coexist peacefully and harmoniously, no matter what God, if any, we believe in. And in my personal belief, if we can coexist peacefully for a moment, we should be able to perpetuate that moment into an eternity.

The contribution of religion to humanity is not about absolutes; it is about enabling structured peaceful living in communities, and giving people morals through which they live their lives. As religions develop and some might say modernise, conflict will indeed become less of an issue. Our job is to help the development process, guide it into a positive direction.

In the same way, governments, institutions, and religious bodies themselves owe it to humanity to respect the freedom of religion, the freedom of thought; the freedom to define our own humanity.

Religion has both internal and external components. Internally, moral values, patterns of thought, and philosophical perception of life itself is shaped by the religion you choose to believe in. Externally there are traditions, rituals of prayer or otherwise, and qualities of society, from social norms, to legal infrastructure and framework, which are and have been shaped by dominant religions of any given society.

All of the above differences, in the cases of societies dominated by one religion, lead to very different social network characteristics and way of life. A predominantly Christian society is fundamentally different to a predominantly Muslim society.

More than any other single factor in any nation's structure, in any family's relations, religion shapes, colours and nurtures them.

When we accept that nations, towns, families, and individuals can develop and change over time, we will have embraced religious freedom. It is not only the nature but also a fundamental component of the democratic process.

It is an honour to host more than 30 visionaries in our special edition on Religious Freedom. Our contributors have participated in a dialogue process that will pave the way to mutual understanding between nations, political groups, individuals, and more importantly between religions.

Together, word by word, we add a small brick to the bridge of religious freedom.



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NEWEUROPE

EDITOR

Dennis Kefalacos
dkefalacos@neurope.eu

SENIOR EDITORIAL TEAM

Kostis Geropoulos (Energy & Russian Affairs)
kgeropoulos@neurope.eu
Andy Carling (EU Affairs)
acarling@neurope.eu
Cillian Donnelly (EU Affairs)
cdonnelly@neurope.eu
Ariti Alamanou (Legal Affairs)
aalamanou@neurope.eu
Alexandra Koronakis (Columnist)
acoronaki@neurope.eu
Louise Kissa (Fashion)
lkissa@neurope.eu

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Spyros Paloukis
spyrospaloukis@yahoo.gr

DIRECTOR & RELIGIOUS FREEDOM EDITION EDITOR

Alexandros Koronakis
akoronakis@neurope.eu

EXECUTIVE LAYOUT PRODUCER

Suman Haque
suman@neurope.eu

MARKETING & ADVERTISING

Ania Lara
alara@neurope.eu

SUBSCRIPTIONS & DISTRIBUTION

Christina Kapranou
ckapranou@neurope.eu
Subscriptions are available worldwide

INDEPENDENCE

New Europe is a privately owned independent publication, not subsidised or financed in any way by any EU institution or other entity.

BRUSSELS HEADQUARTERS

Av. de Tervuren/Tervurenlaan 96,
1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel. +32 2 5390039
Fax +32 2 5390339
info@neurope.eu

PUBLISHERS

NEW EUROPE S.A.
Blvd Napoleon I, 66
2210 Luxembourg
Tel. +32 2 5390339
E-Mail: publisher@neurope.eu

EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Signed Contributions express solely the views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the newspaper.

NE is printed on recycled paper.

ISSN number: 1106-8299

TURKEY

- 5** **Archbishop Demetrios of America**
From unimaginable darkness to freedom and light
- 6** **Poul Nyrup Rasmussen**
Freedom of religion: Social justice breeds tolerance
- 7** **Wilfried Martens**
Religious freedom in Turkey and the role of religion in European politics
- 8** **Egemen Bağış**
Seeking for the "Circle of Justice" (Daire-i Adliye)
- 9** **Renate Sommer**
Endangered Species: Religious minorities in Turkey
- 10** **Amanda Paul**
EU membership and religious freedoms in Turkey
- 11** **Jay Sekulow and Grégor Puppinc**
*Between Islamism and secularism
Is there room left for religious freedom in Turkey?*
- 12** **Pieter Omtzigt**
Turkey, freedom of religion and the Council of Europe
- 13** **Otmar Oehring**
Issues and concerns of religious minorities in Turkey
- 14** **Sencer Ayata**
Democracy and religious freedoms in Turkey
- 15** **Mine Yildirim**
Substantial change is necessary
- 16** **Emre Öktem**
*Interfaith understanding and dialogue:
A way to cross the bridge*
- 17** **Robert Ellis**
Separate but unequal citizens
- 17_b** **Johnny Messo**
*The Sincerity of Turkey's Democracy?
The Case of the Indigenous Aramean (Syriac) People*
- 18** **Dionyssis Kefalacos**
Religious freedom; economy and politics
- 19** **Andy Carling**
*What's so funny about peace,
love and understanding?*
- 20** **Alia Papageorgiou**
Who goes to church on Sundays ?
- 21** **Cillian Donnelly**
God or not – freedom is freedom

NEW EUROPE

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- Thomas Hammarberg**
Muslims also have the right to practice their religion **22**
- Rodi Kratsa**
"Freedom of Religion" Intercultural and interreligious dialogue in Europe **23**
- Heiner Bielefeldt**
Limitations on religious freedom have 'chilling effect' **24**
- Mario Mauro**
Freedom of belief must be a freedom to co-exist **25**
- Fiorello Provera**
Pakistan: persecution in the name of Islam **26**
- Charles Tannock**
Sudan: a political solution to religious persecution? **27**
- Konrad Szymanski**
Persecution against Christians remains unnoticed **28**
- Sophia in 't Veld**
The need for a secular voice in the European Union **29**
- Nicolas Berger**
Human rights: the basis of harmony **30**
- Greg Austin**
Muslims living in fear **31**
- George Readings**
Religious freedom and extremism **32**
- Willy Fautré**
Full veil, burqa, niqab, hijab... a challenge to 'European' values? **33**
- Andy Darmoo**
Assyrian Christians face destruction in Iraq **34**
- Francisco Jaime Quesado**
The new frontiers **35**

WORLD

PROFILE

HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: Bridgebuilder and Peace-Maker



Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Benedict XVI after the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of St Andrew at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Nov 30, 2006.

Born Demetrios Archondonis in 1940 on the island of Imvros (today, Gokceada, Turkey), and elected 270th successor to the 2000-year-old Church founded by St. Andrew as well as Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch, His All Holiness Bartholomew I presides among all Orthodox Primates as the spiritual leader of 300 million faithful.

As a citizen of Turkey, his personal experience provides him with a unique perspective on religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has worked for reconciliation among Christian Churches and acquired an international reputation for environmental awareness and protection. He has worked to advance reconciliation among Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox communities, such as in former Yugoslavia, and is supportive of peace-building measures to diffuse global conflict in the region. He has also presided over the restoration of the autocephalous Church of Albania and the autonomous Church of Estonia, proving a constant source of spiritual and moral support to those traditionally Orthodox countries emerging from decades of wide-scale religious persecution behind the Iron Curtain.

The current Ecumenical Patriarch's roles as the primary spiritual leader of the Orthodox Christian world and a transnational figure of global significance continue to become more vital each day. He co-sponsored the Peace and Tolerance Conference in Istanbul (1994) bringing together Christians, Muslims and Jews. Most noted are his efforts in environmental

awareness, which have earned him the title "Green Patriarch." These endeavors, together with his efforts to promote religious freedom and human rights, have placed him at the forefront as an apostle of love, peace and reconciliation, earning him the Congressional Gold Medal by the United States Congress in 1997.

After completing his undergraduate studies at the Theological School of Halki (1961), he pursued graduate studies at the Pontifical Oriental Institute of the Gregorian University in Rome, the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, and the University of Munich. Ordained to the Diaconate in 1961 and to the priesthood in 1969, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew served as personal secretary to his predecessor, the late Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios (1972-1991), and was elected Metropolitan of Philadelphia (1973) and, later, Metropolitan of Chalcedon (1990). His tenure has been characterized by inter-Orthodox cooperation, inter-Christian and interreligious dialogue, as well as by formal trips to other Orthodox countries seldom previously visited. He has exchanged official visitations and accepted numerous invitations with ecclesiastical and state dignitaries.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I holds numerous honorary doctorates, from the universities of Athens and Thessaloniki (Greece), Georgetown and Yale (United States), Flinders and Manila (Australasia), London, Edinburgh and Louvain, as well as Moscow and Bucharest (Europe). He speaks Greek, Turkish, Italian, German, French, English and Latin.



From unimaginable darkness to freedom and light

by *Archbishop Demetrios of America*

Archbishop Demetrios of America Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate



Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew celebrating Easter at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Apr 4, 2010.



HUGO INFANTE - GOVERNMENT OF CHILE



Who will rouse the global community to show itself strong on behalf of the millions whose inalienable right to worship God as they choose have been so sharply curtailed?

In recent months our whole world was transfixed with the plight of thirty-three men trapped in a mine in Chile. Day by day the newspapers reported on their condition, and when at last a rescue was in progress, television and internet news sources provided continuous coverage. The entire global community watched and cheered as one by one the men were pulled up from a prison of unimaginable darkness and welcomed back into the world of freedom and light.

The world responded with open arms and prayerful hearts for the thirty-three men in the San José mine in Copiapó, Chile and for the agony of their families. From every continent, governments and corporations reached out with offers of equipment, supplies, and technical knowledge to help liberate the miners or give comfort to their loved ones. It was a beautiful testament to the power of international cooperation and unity of purpose. So much is possible when the humanity speaks with one voice and acts with a common purpose in love! Truly, miracles can happen.

Thirty-three have been saved and now breathe the pure air of freedom.

But many more in our world today need to breathe that same air

of religious liberty. They are imprisoned—not in a copper mine in South America—but in the restrictive and oppressive atmosphere surrounding religious minorities around the globe.

They might be hindered in the open practice of their beliefs, or their churches and religious institutions might be confiscated or even vandalized and destroyed. Like the miners in Chile, those denied religious freedom feel suffocated in narrow, confined circumstances that are beyond their control, beyond their power to escape.

Unfortunately, this continues to happen in our world today. But in most newspapers, there are no daily headlines, and on the cable news channels there is no round-the-clock coverage. Out of sight and out of mind, our brothers and sisters suffer in silence and endure in obscurity.

The world spoke and acted on behalf of the brave thirty-three. Who will rouse the global community to show itself strong on behalf of the millions whose inalienable right to worship God as they choose have been so sharply curtailed?

Thanks be to God for the work of the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, both of the Order of

Saint Andrew in America and of the Pammakaristos Brotherhood in Europe. Working together, they have envisioned a bold move to shine the light of day on long-standing issues of human rights and religious liberty. This action is all the more timely with the petitions of the Turkish government for the inclusion of that country in the European Union.

The International Archon Conference on Religious Freedom in Turkey is a monumental event: it is an unprecedented effort to bring together scholars and advocates from Turkey, Europe, and America, and to have them discuss openly and candidly our common human values of rights, responsibilities, and liberties, with specific application to the status of religious minorities in Turkey. This meeting will help forge a path towards mutual understanding, respect, and awareness.

Moreover, it will be a discussion that is truly beneficial to the enlightened self-interest of the entire Turkish nation and of the European Union as they look forward to

new prospects of friendship and cooperation.

Not only so, the International Archon Conference on Religious Freedom in Turkey establishes for the rest of the world a paradigm on how to open up the way to freedom for religion in all parts of the globe. It is my prayer that this conference will offer an effective template for other countries and communities. In offering this model of peaceful engagement, the Archons truly live up to the meaning of their name, as leaders in the forefront of change and progress.

Imagine the joy that will be ours when we see the rescue, not of thirty-three, but of thousands upon thousands of men, women, and children around the world raised up and standing once more in the brilliant light of religious freedom!

May the Lord our God bless the labors of the representatives and attendees of the International Archon Conference on Religious Freedom in Turkey, and may the Lord grant peace to all the people of Turkey, Europe, and our whole world.



Freedom of religion: Social justice breeds tolerance

by *Poul Nyrup Rasmussen*

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen is President of the Party of European Socialists, and former Prime Minister of Denmark



A Turkish Shiite Muslim pupil runs past a line of Shiite women, dressed in black for a mourning ceremony, during an Ashura procession in Istanbul, 19 January 2008.

Europe, with its examples and experience, history and traditions, is obligated to lead on the issue of religious freedom. All but the most extreme except that this leadership should start from the bedrock principle of church-state separation. In 2010 this obligation has moved from the realms of academic debate to a practical test of our shared European values. It is a conversation that has acquired a real sense of urgency as political developments reveal, across the continent, the fragility of these principles. The rise of religious and ethnic intolerance is becoming more and more prevalent. Extremist parties promote a distorted image of Islam. Extreme Islamists exacerbate the problem with inflammatory statements which are then amplified in the media. They promote stereotypes and they deliberately blur the lines between myth and reality. The debate becomes increasingly polarised.

Our challenge in the PES is to confront these distortions. Our responsibility is to be the calm voice that separates the rhetoric and the fear-mongering of these extremists from the reality. European Socialism has a strong rich tradition in EU Member States. This tradition and our success over the years, has been based on the realisation that the broad majority of Europeans, irrespective of beliefs, ethnicity, or value systems, are tolerant and moderate.

However one core belief of the PES remains central to the debate – our commitment to social justice. Today Europe is wracked by the crippling

effects of austerity measures. Conservative-led programmes are chipping away the pillars of the welfare state. The PES has long called for a more rational and balanced economic approach. However our way does not just make economic sense. It is also true that security, both economic and social, promotes tolerance. Social justice is a long term investment that facilitates respect for religious freedom. The EU and its political and social forces can play a key role in defending religious freedom if an integrated approach is applied and courageously defended both in and out of Europe. The PES is committed to leading this drive towards tolerance.

The last decade has been portrayed as a difficult one for the European Union. That is certainly the perception. But the reality is that many positive achievements have been secured. In the context of Religious Freedom, one of the most heartening steps was the drafting and the agreement of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The charter as a whole remains to some extent a 'sleeping giant'.

It is, in other words, a collection of articles that are laudable but wait to have bestowed upon them a full legal personality. EU jurisprudence must signpost the practical application of the charter, case by case. However the significant step of articulating and committing to these principles should not be dismissed.

One principle that should be celebrated for being reflected in the EU Treaty, but which still

awaits such 'road-testing' is Article 10.1: Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

This article states that; "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance".

The Party of European Socialists (PES) sees the issue in terms of how to make sure that both individuals and communities are given rights. Making human rights the founding principle upon which the debate is framed, provides the answer. In true European style this should of course be done in an integrated way. But what does this mean in practice?

The answer brings us back to the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Article 14.3: Right to Education, Article 21: Non Discrimination and Article 22: Cultural, religious and linguistic diversity all point the way towards this integrated approach. Put simply, it emphasizes the fundamental European principle that religious freedom is built on the rock of human rights.

The freedom to express religious beliefs and the richly diverse way in which these beliefs can be communicated, are manifestations of a robust and vibrant society. The success to which these beliefs respect and enforce fundamental human rights is the sign of a healthy society.



Religious freedom in Turkey and the role of religion in European politics

by *Wilfried Martens*

Wilfried Martens is the President of the European People's Party and the Centre for European Studies, and former Prime Minister of Belgium

For us Christian Democrats and many like-minded parties on the European Centre Right, the Christian concept of Man has been the point of departure in developing political ideas for one and a half centuries. This Christian concept says that each person is unique and irreplaceable, that people are both free and interdependent and that each man and woman have both the right and the duty to be fully responsible of their acts. Based on this, we have defined our fundamental values such as freedom, responsibility, equality, justice and solidarity. And based on this, we have worked out ideas like subsidiarity and a strong and integrated European Union. But we would never consider the Bible a political document, or doubt the necessity of structurally separating the state and religious communities.

Having said that, we recognise the positive contribution that faith-based concepts can make to wise and humane policy-making in other parts of the world. Turkey is such a case. We recognise the enormous progress Turkey has made on the way to EU membership since the European Council decision of 2000 to grant this country the status of candidate. Especially in the first years of the rule of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), this progress referred not only to improved economic stability and enhanced economic growth rates. It also concerned the rule of law and the situation of ethnic and religious minorities. We believe that this progress is due to the fact that the AKP, which has observer status in the European People's Party, has managed rather well to draw positive inspiration from faith for the development of political ideas, without compromising the secular character of the Turkish state.

But in recent years I have gained the impression that the dynamism for reform, and the eagerness to strengthen the rights of minorities, especially religious minorities, have somehow diminished. It is still far easier to build a Mosque in any current EU

member state than to build a Church anywhere in Turkey. Turkey's over 60.000 Christians, most of them Armenian Orthodox, still face considerable hardships. Despite some recent progress in the possibility of creating Christian foundations that may own land, it is still very difficult to open up theological learning centres or to train priests in seminaries. This unequal status is not limited to Christians and Jews but also concerns the Alevite denomination (with several million members) within Islam which has no official recognition at all.

On all these points, tangible progress is possible. And it is necessary, in fact, if the EU accession negotiations are to advance. Sure enough, the question of the equal status of Christians and other religious minorities may not be the most pressing obstacle for the moment – the issue of Northern Cyprus, for example, is probably much more urgent and also more difficult to solve. But religious tolerance is particularly important to us Christian Democrats of the European Union.

This article would be incomplete without looking at the European Union itself, and the question of religious tolerance vis-à-vis the growing number of immigrants from Muslim countries. There is an intense debate on such phenomena as burqas, political radicalisation in some mosques, forced marriages and other aspects of what has come to be called "parallel societies": collectives in which the central values of our societies, such as equal rights for men and women, are systematically disregarded. It is true that in recent elections in Sweden and the Netherlands, extremist political parties have used xenophobic arguments and impermissible generalisations about Muslims in order to attract votes. This is regrettable but cannot easily or quickly be changed within our democracies. All democrats must patiently and determinedly reject such ideas. But they must also make an effort to take the fears of our citizens seriously.

Two things are clear to me: first, the vast majority of Muslims



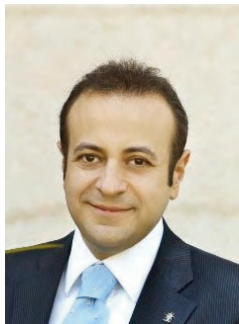
Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew leading the VII Symposium: The Arctic - Mirror of Life, Coast of Greenland, September, 2007.

in the EU does not live in "parallel societies", and has no desire to do so. Second, societal discrimination of Muslims exists, just like there is hardly a country on earth without any de facto discrimination. But what is crucial here is that our governments are seriously trying to do something about this. That they are entering into structured dialogues with mosque organisations and faith-based Muslim NGOs. That they are developing schemes on how to integrate imam training and Islamic theology into European academia. And that they are, at the same time, becoming more determined in prosecuting criminal behaviour such as forced marriages, or incitement to violence by some imams.

I am deeply convinced that religion is and remains an excellent inspiration for the values on which political programs are built – no matter whether we speak about the member parties of the EPP in the European Union, or about the AKP in Turkey. But this only works if all existing religions in a given society can thrive and develop in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect.

“

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Seeking the “Circle of Justice” (Daire-i Adliye)

by *Egemen Bağış*

Egemen Bağış is the Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator of Turkey

A continent witnessing the bloodiest wars of the human history has turned itself into a symbol of peace through mutual understanding and dialogue under the motto of ‘Unity in Diversity’. However, especially recently, it is questionable whether EU really is successful at realizing its motto.

On the top of the iceberg, there are many rules and regulations aiming at preventing all types of discrimination against different cultural and religious groups. What about the discrimination in minds? The downwards part of the iceberg reflects a different picture of what exists in reality throughout Europe.

Samuel Huntington's highly disputed theory of ‘clash of civilizations’ reinforced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, have turned religious freedom and tolerance into an intensely debated topic. In the last decade, especially Islamophobia has raised ominously in Europe and USA. In an unfair manner, a large section in the Western world has kept Islam and Muslims responsible for those cursed attacks. Sadly, the situation is exploited by the extreme-right and racist fractions. The extreme right-wing parties particularly in some northern European countries have obtained political support from the public and have even taken part in governments. Resting on the election results in their individual countries, they have further tempered their discourse against Muslims.

At that point one wonders what European values are? Aren't we talking about cultural pluralism, tolerance, respect to diversities etc. Then let me quote from Mevlana (Rumi), one of the most important Sufis of eastern philosophy and humanism:

*‘Come, come, whoever you are.
Wanderer, Worshipper, lover of leaving.
It doesn't matter.*

*Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Come, even if you have broken your vow a hundred
times. Come, yet again, come, come’*

It is the doctrine embodied in this quotation that indicates the perspective of Anatolia and in fact the ideological foundation of the Ottoman Empire. This ideology facilitated the peaceful co-existence of various religious and ethnic groups in harmony for centuries. In the classical sense of the Ottoman state setting, the system that enabled different groups to live together was called Daire-i Adliye (Circle of Justice). Circle of Justice was the backbone of the system. It was the philosophy and ideology of the Empire providing justice to ensure that every culture had its own way of living guaranteed by the state.

No surprise, the Ottoman Empire provided its people with a free and more tolerant atmosphere than their contemporary European counterparts. Sultan Mehmet the second, after the conquest of Istanbul had permitted the independent functioning of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

More interestingly, he let the conditions for the foundation of the Armenian Church, which was not allowed in the Byzantine era. I am proud to express that today; both churches are still actively functioning after 600-700 years. Again, it was not a coincidence that the Jews exiled from Spain in the 15th century have taken shelter under the Ottoman Empire.

The most striking point here is that it was not the western originated idea of modern human rights where the system had not been based on. Rather, it was developed within the framework of universal justice. At a time when Muslims are excluded or discrimina-



Egemen Bağış

ted against in Western societies on the grounds that they destroy Western values, it is worth remembering the background.

One might ask the current situation in Turkey. Turkey has had a democracy experience of ups and down for the last 80 years. Speaking about freedom of religion Turkey faced some difficult times whatever the reasons might be. In line with the common practice in the European countries as well as with our secular constitutional system, religious and spiritual communities practice their beliefs on the basis of the equality of citizens and on the principle of the freedom of religion. Nevertheless, there had been times where some shortcomings occurred in the implementation of these laws. However, Turkey is changing with great pace and becoming a more liberal and open society.

Our government has put enormous efforts into the socio-economic transformation of the country. Government is giving priority to the issues of non-Muslim minorities by meeting them quite frequently. Most recently, the Akdamar Church and Sümela Monastery which were closed worship for decades were resonated with the sounds of prayers once again. The Alevi opening that launched new mechanisms to handle our Alevi citizens' issues had been a significant step within the framework of institutionalizing religious freedoms in Turkey.

Turkey is pursuing a Roman initiative to resolve the problems of its Roman citizens. This is happening at a time when some Member countries are deporting Roman people who are even EU citizens.

As the Government, one of our primary goals is to further sustain this mutual understanding by enabling our citizens to live in harmony and practice their religions freely. The recent developments in Turkey together with its historical heritage will contribute to the creation of ideal society in Europe.

Turkey is becoming closer to what Europe Union stands for. At this point, there is one question that should be answered honestly by our European friends:



One might ask the current situation in Turkey. Turkey has had a democracy experience of ups and down for the last 80 years. Speaking about freedom of religion Turkey faced some difficult times whatever the reasons might be ... There had been times where some shortcomings occurred in the implementation of these laws. However, Turkey is changing with great pace and becoming a more liberal and open society.

“What kind of Europe do you want to live in?” The answer to this question will also indicate a precise attitude towards Turkey's possible EU membership. If Europe wants to restore a social order where ‘unity in diversity’ happens for real, it has to incorporate Turkey. I believe that our European friends have the will and power to create a modern ‘Circle of Justice’ in the 21st century Europe.



Endangered Species: Religious minorities in Turkey

by *Renate Sommer*

Renate Sommer is a Member of the European Parliament with the European People's Party from Germany. She is also a member of the Delegation to the EU-Turkey JPC and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs



Spyros Paloukis | www.spyrospaloukis.com



*It is time to stop this deception!
Freedom of religion is a fundamental principle of the community of values in the EU and cannot be negotiated.*

In his recent visit to Turkey, German president Christian Wulff correctly stated that Christianity belongs to Turkey. In the Turkish city of Antakya, Jesus' devotees for the first time called themselves as Christians. Anatolia was the heartland of the Christian Byzantine Empire and millions of Christians and other religious minorities lived in the Ottoman Empire.

In light of this history, the situation of Christians and other religious minorities in Turkey today is alarming. Having suffered genocide, displacement and discrimination, the number of religious minorities from Christian and Jewish descent has diminished significantly. Today, only 1% of the Turkish population is Christian or Jewish constituting only 92.000 citizens of Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox or Jewish belief. In addition, the Muslim minority of the 15 to 20 million Alevis in Turkey faces major impediments with regard to the exercise of their belief.

While Atatürk's foundation of a modern Turkish nation is based on the principle of laicism, placing religion in the private sphere, the definition of the "Turkish" nation was always equated with a "Muslim" nation. Accordingly, devotees of an alien religion were considered as danger to national unity. Although the Treaty of Lausanne grants special legal minority status to "non-Muslim minorities" and even the Turkish Constitution enshrines freedom of belief, worship and prohibition of discrimination on religious grounds, these principles were invalidated by contradictory articles and the adoption of problematic laws, such as the law on foundations.

As a consequence, religious minorities in Turkey experience significant hurdles in exercising their religion: Up until today, churches do not have a legal status. They are considered as foundations, whose rights are strictly regulated by the General Directorate for Foundations. Despite of the amendments on the law of foundation, minority foundations still face problems in the ac-

quisition of properties and the building of new churches. Many congregations, monastery Mor Gabriel being the most popular example, still struggle with unlawful expropriations. The religious affiliation is clearly stated in the I.D. card opening the floodgates to harassment by state officials and policemen. Furthermore, the prohibition of the training of priests by non-Turkish citizens accompanied with the closing of several seminaries makes it almost impossible to train young priests.

The Turkish government does not only accept these hindrances in silence, but openly contributes to the process. Despite of all awovels to improve the situation of religious minorities, there is continuing reluctance to guarantee the position of these minorities in the law. The reform of the law of foundations, which is a cornerstone for the economic survival of religious communities, falls short of the expectations: it fails to address the issue of restitution for properties sold to third-parties and does not explicitly abrogate the status of "confiscated" foundations.

Furthermore, there are no government programmes that address the prejudice towards religious minorities in Turkish society. The growing amount of misinformative and contemptuous media coverage stirs social harassment and violence. Muslims, who convert to another religion, increasingly become targets of violence. The killing of Hrant Dink and the three Protestant Christians in Malatya in April 2007 are sad examples for the excesses of violence.

Given this situation, it does not come as a surprise that more and more Christians and members of other religious minorities decide to leave the country. If the delaying tactics of the government continue, religious minorities in Turkey might even become extinct. The behaviour of the Turkish government and public authorities casts serious doubt on their willingness to

avert such a situation. The state controlled authority on religious affairs, Diyanet, which pays the salaries of all imams and other mosque officials, has no interest in sharing its 1.3 billion USD government funds with other religious groups. Furthermore, the ruling AK-party has undertaken several steps that are a sign of subtle islamization. Proposals such as the criminalization of adultery, the lifting of the age limit for children in quran schools or the establishment of separated beaches for women and men are only some examples. Currently, the AK-Party is successful in lifting the headscarf ban in public buildings under the disguise to preserve individual basic rights.

The disrespect for the EU demand to guarantee religious freedom is also evident in statements and actions by many government officials. The establishment of a new EU-Center in a building, that was unlawfully expropriated from the Greek-Orthodox church foundation, was a slap in the face of the EU and religious minorities in Turkey. The recent authorizations of Armenian and Greek Orthodox church services in Sümela-monastery and in Van, which have been intensely solicited by Egeman Bagis in Turkish and EU-media, is nothing more than a clumsy attempt to butter up the European Commission before the release of the upcoming progress report.

It is time to stop this deception! Freedom of religion is a fundamental principle of the community of values in the EU and cannot be negotiated. The mere mentioning of shortcomings in the Commission progress reports is not sufficient. If the Commission and the member states do not bear clear consequences, the exodus of minority groups and the destruction of some of the oldest archaeological evidence will make Christian and Jewish heritage in Turkey disappear. If we accept this, we betray our own principle of "Unity in Diversity!"



EU membership and religious freedoms in Turkey

by *Amanda Paul*

Amanda Paul is an analyst for the European Policy Centre in Brussels



Hagia Sophia, one of the greatest surviving examples of Byzantine architecture.

Freedom of religion is considered to be a fundamental human right. It is also something that the EU places great importance on and therefore those countries that are looking to join the Club need to meet EU standards on this.

The EU should recognise that while much remains to be done in Turkey, the country is taking the necessary steps to tackle past deficits. Clearly, Turkey is not the country it was ten years ago; it recognizes the need to change and its process with the EU is acting as a vehicle to nudge the process along. Therefore the EU needs to keep pressure on Turkey.

Turkey has been negotiating membership with the EU since October 2005. Freedom of religion has been quite a problematic area with Turkey having something of a patchy record - principally the result of the rather restrictive and oppressive policy carried out for decades following the birth of the Republic in 1923. Indeed under the Ottoman Empire (particularly during late 19th century), freedom of religion was far less restrictive for many of the Empire's minorities than under the Kemalist regime that followed

For decades demands for greater religious freedoms fell on deaf ears. Only as Turkey began negotiations with the EU did change start to occur.

The anchoring of Turkey to the EU has facilitated changes in the country with Ankara coming under pressure to improve the situation and urgently boost religious tolerance and expand rights, particularly for non-Muslims (Syriac, Catholic, Greek, Jewish and Armenian communities in parti-

cular) but for others too including the Alevi's (a Muslim sect numbering some 20 million).

Each year the situation is assessed by the European Commission. The Commission's 2009 Progress Report contained quite a lot of criticism including continuing difficulties in relation to places of worship - non-Muslim communities frequently reported discrimination with applications for alloca-

the continued closure of the Greek Orthodox seminary on Heybeliada; non-Muslim communities - as organized structures of religious groups - still facing problems due to lack of legal personality; restrictions on the training of clergy; the Ecumenical Patriarch was not free to use the ecclesiastical title 'Ecumenical' on all occasions.

Furthermore many members of minority religious groups claimed that their wor-

developing their education and carrying out religious services in their Aramaic native language. The list could go on.

It would be naïve to believe that change would happen overnight and the process of granting further religious freedoms has been slow with many of the above issues remaining unresolved. Nevertheless progress is being made although the ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) faces stiff opposition from many circles including from the nationalist opposition which believe it is against "Turkishness and the Turkish-Muslim nature of Turkey".

They believe that by opening up in this way, particularly to non-Muslim minorities, it will quickly snowball into demands for Turkish territory. These day non-Muslim minorities represent only 1% of the population so this could hardly constitute a major threat.

2010 has seen some groundbreaking developments. Firstly the historic service at the Sümela Monastery in the Black Sea province of Trabzon. Three-thousand Orthodox Christians gathered for the mass. Although allowed only one day in the year, the service was the first in Turkey's republican history.

A second big moment took place at Lake Van when the first Armenian Orthodox ceremony in nearly a century was held. The church, which has been closed for services since the 1915 Armenian genocide becoming a symbol of Turkey's troubled past with Armenia. And after years of opposition the government has recently agreed to return a Greek orphanage to the Orthodox Patriarch. It took courage to take these steps which should be viewed as part of the progress of the opening up of the country.

Efforts are also underway to improve relations with the Alevi's and AKP initiatives, such holding meetings to discuss the Alevi problem and Prime Minister Erdogan attending an Alevi Iftar dinner - the first ever Turkish Prime Minister to do so - should be viewed very positively. However there is still some way to go with many Alevis believing their demands are not being met. In October there was a sit-in organized by the Alevi community protesting against the "constitutional mandated religious culture and moral knowledge classes" which they view as a state sponsored assimilation process.

Turkey is slowly shredding its old skin and breaking the taboos of the past. The fact that people can debate the issues openly is already a huge step forward. Turkey needs to ensure that everybody has all of their religious freedoms and is able to exercise their religions properly. There should be no need to fear different cultures and religions, rather they should be seen as enriching and therefore be embraced. What is important is that these steps are followed by more and that the EU plays a strong role in continuing to support and push Turkey on this issue.



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tion of places of worship with Protestant churches and Jehovah's witnesses prayer halls often facing court cases; the Alevi's places of worship (Cem houses) also had pending court cases even though many municipalities had recognized Cem houses as places of worship; personal documents such as ID cards, still included information on religion, leaving potential for harassment; judicial proceedings continued against conscientious objectors on religious grounds;

ship activities were monitored and recorded by security forces, the Armenian Patriarchate's proposal to open a university department for the Armenian language and clergy continues to be pending and the Syriacs can provide only informal training, outside any officially established schools. Turkey also fails to recognize and protect the Syriac people as a minority, which is indigenous to south-east Turkey, in conformity with the Lausanne Treaty including



Between Islamism and secularism

Is there room left for religious freedom in Turkey?

By Jay Sekulow and Grégor Puppincq

Jay Sekulow is Chief Counsel to the American Center for Law and Justice, Washington D.C. and to the European Center for Law and Justice in Strasbourg, Grégor Puppincq is Director of the European Center for Law and Justice

Turkey is the only Member State of the Council of Europe where, in peace time, assaults and assassinations motivated by religious hatred is not uncommon, as was witnessed in the recent ritual murder of Msgr Luigi Padovese, the personal representative of the Pope in Turkey. Anti-Semitism and Christianophobia are widespread in public opinion. Many people are questioning whether there is room in Turkey for religious liberty as it is torn between islamism and secularism. These extreme approaches of the role of religion in society seem to be omnipresent in Turkey and to occupy all political space to the point where moderation seems impossible. The European Institutions such as those in Brussels and Strasbourg have been increasingly attempting to promote religious moderation in Turkish politics for over ten years. Because of the sociological and cultural specificity of Turkey, the European Institutions have not always required the same standard of protection for the rights of minorities that is required in European countries. This low level of requirement from the West can be explained by different factors: the geopolitical importance of Turkey, the low number of non-Muslim minorities remaining in Turkey, and finally, the hidden belief that religious moderation might not be in the nature of

the current Muslim culture.

The European Court of Human Rights has been led to adopt a different approach depending on whether the case before it is aimed at religious minority or not. Because these religious communities cannot constitute a threat to the secularism of the State and are inherently victims simply by being a minority, the court accords them a certain attention if not a special protection.

Thus the Court is effective in this regard. The Court rules regularly on important issues, particularly relating to property rights, and it is the jurisprudence of the Court that has led to reform the law governing associations and foundations in order to provide the beginning of a legal framework for the churches properties. However, the non-Muslim minorities of Turkey still not have a legal personality. The consequences of this are many and well-known. Communities that have had land and buildings for centuries cannot still be registered as their direct owners. This situation, justified in the name of the principle of secularism, also has a symbolic meaning: if one cannot legally own the land, they remain a foreigner. This is a way to keep the minorities in a condition of subjection.

The religious context is so sensitive in Turkey that it had, in some extent, destabilised the jurisprudence of the European court of human right. In attempting to preserve the social and institutional balance of Turkey, the Court of Strasbourg has adopted a jurisprudence of exception for them. This is exemplified by well-known Leyla Şahin and Refah Partisi cases acknowledging the legitimacy of the dissolution of a religious political party and the prohibition on wearing the head scarf.

The impact of this destabilising effect reaches far beyond the initial problem from where it originated. Thus, it is through the case law on Islam and Turkey in particular that the Court has gradually raised the principle of secularism to heights never before achieved, making it one of the principles underlying any democratic and pluralistic society.



Muslim inhabitant of Andrinople (Edirne) (L) Muslim horseman of Andrinople (Edirne) (M) and Christian partisan of Andrinople (Edirne) (R).

Flickr - yusefrahbi

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Anti-Semitism and Christianophobia are widespread in public opinion. Many people are questioning whether there is room in Turkey for religious liberty as it is torn between islamism and secularism.

Thus, the Turkish specific situation contributes to shaping in a quite radical way, for all of Europe, the jurisprudence of the European Court in the matter of State and Religions. This phenomenon is increased by the Turkey's wave of immigration across Europe. The Turkish diaspora exports its religiosity within Western culture. The response of Western legislatures and of the Court of Strasbourg to the risk of 'islamisation' of western society has been again to strengthen secularism, so that in certain respects, Turkish secularism could be a foreshadowing of an increasingly secularised Eu-

rope.

Thus, Turkey is a real cause of concern for religious freedom, both in Turkey and in Europe. The ECLJ, as an NGO dedicated to the promotion of Religious freedom, we believe secularism is not the appropriate response to contend with Islamism and Pluralism.

An empty public space has nothing to propose and even less to oppose. In this regard, the promotion of the European spiritual and moral and morals is essential, and the advocacy for the rights and of Turkish religious minorities is a real duty, especially for Europe.



Turkey, freedom of religion and the Council of Europe

by *Pieter Omtzigt*

Pieter Omtzigt is a Member of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly from the Netherlands

Right after World War II, in 1949, 10 European countries founded the Council of Europe, the human rights watchdog of Europe with teeth. Turkey joined later in the same year. This is a fundamental choice of Turkey to be judged by the new and very high European standards on Human Rights. It was a choice to be involved with Europe and not with the Middle East and its standards. Right after probably the darkest episode in European history this was a courageous choice.

The States went far: the European Convention on Human Rights, signed in 1950, gives every person present in one of the states – not only its own citizens – the right to challenge any final court decision on the basis of Human Rights. Article 9 of the convention gives a very clear definition of freedom of religion:

“ARTICLE 9

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

Article 9 is far reaching. One example suffices. According to large schools of thought apostasy in Islam is punishable, even by death. Yet article 9 clearly states the freedom to of religion and the freedom to change religion.

The most important institution of the council of Europe is the Court. Yet this article will focus on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). All 47 Member States (basically all Euro-

pean States but Belarus, whose human rights record is awful) send members of Parliament to this assembly. Since this does not only include the 27 EU countries, but also Russia, Turkey, the Ukraine, Switzerland and many Balkan countries and small states, this is far more inclusive Assembly than the European Parliament.

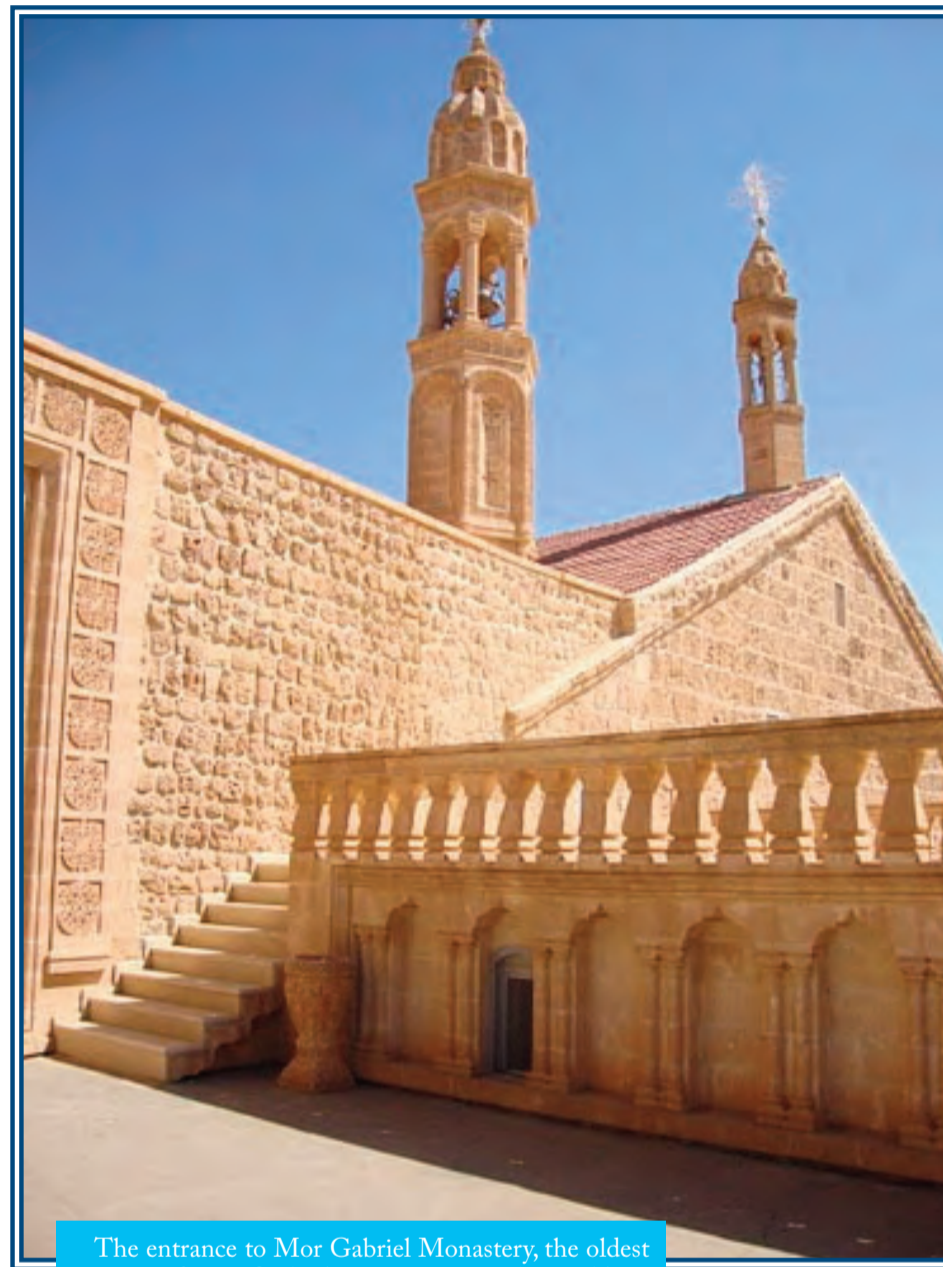
It has the power to investigate, recommend and advise. Especially on human rights and fundamental freedoms, its recommendations carry weight within Europe.

In the committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Swiss senator Dick Marty led the investigation into secret US prisons in the battle against terrorism. There is very strong indication that these prisons were hosted in Poland, in Romania and in Lithuania (this last country was not in the report), as soon as the investigation was well under way.

PACE has limited resources and rarely investigates on the freedom of religion in particular countries as a theme of a report. Yet exactly the “Freedom of religion and other human rights for non-Muslim minorities in Turkey and for the Muslim minority in Thrace [Eastern Greece],” was subject of an investigation and discussed in the assembly in January 2010.

The January 2010 session was a memorable session for one other reason: for the first time, the Assembly had elected a Turkish MP and founding member of the ruling AK-Party, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, its president for a two year term.

In this report, Mr. Hunault, a French MP, had tried not to rock the boat too much. He gave a number of advises to both countries. On the Turkish side, the recommendations only extended to the Jewish, Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches, the three religions, which according to the Turkish government enjoy protection under the treaty of Lausanne. The treaty of Lausanne was the treaty, which in 1923, estab-



The entrance to Mor Gabriel Monastery, the oldest surviving Syriac Orthodox monastery in the world.

lished the modern republic of Turkey and its borders. It contains provisions for the protection of Muslim minorities in Greece and the non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. It follows the large scale mutually agreed population exchange, whereby Greek Orthodox citizens in Turkey were transferred to Greece and Muslims living in Greece were resettled in Turkey.

The debate itself was remarkable, because a number of parliamentarians broke with the tradition to follow the rapporteur in these delicate issues and toughened up the resolution for Turkey. Religious groups should not only be protected, when recognized by the government, but all groups should be protected.

I tabled a number of amendments with regard to the Syriac minority. The Turkish authorities have started several cases of expropriation against the Mor Gabriel monastery, built in 397. The Syriac Orthodox Church, one of the oldest Christian Churches, is slowly disappearing. Many have left Turkey (and are now leaving Iraq) for the West. In Twente, a small region in the Netherlands,

their number may now be larger than in the whole South East of Turkey.

Yet, they do not have the liberty to found a school or to teach in their own language, Aramaic, which was the native language of Jesus Christ. The resolution now clearly states that they should have those rights and that they should enjoy the protection of minorities foreseen in the treaty of Lausanne and in the Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities. Turkey should sign and ratify that convention, but it does not show signs of doing that.

It was very unfortunate that all Turkish MP's, MPs from Azerbaijan and two other MP's (one of whom comes originally from Turkey), voted against this resolution and all other in favour.

The last line of the resolution is the most important: Turkey and Greece must report back by February 11 2011 how they have implemented the resolution 1704. This reporting back procedure is rare, but necessary. This will be a key test for freedom of religion in Turkey.



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Issues and concerns of religious minorities in Turkey

by *Otmar Oebring*

Otmar Oebring is Director of the Human Rights Office of Missio Society



Greek Orthodox followers light candles during the epiphany day ceremony at St. George Church in Istanbul, Turkey, on Epiphany Day.

When we speak of religious minorities, we are referring to religious groups that distinguish themselves from the majority when it comes to the foundations of their religious belief and whose membership is smaller than that of the largest corresponding population group. However, when one speaks of 'azınlık', the Turkish word for minority, within Turkey itself, the term refers solely to the non-Muslim minorities as defined by the Treaty of Lausanne as interpreted by the Republic of Turkey, which is to say it refers to Armenians, Greeks, Jews and, based on the Bulgarian-Turkish Treaty of Friendship of 18 October 1925, the Bulgarians as well. In de facto terms, the non-Muslim minorities are no more closely defined than 'minorités non-musulmanes', 'non-Moslem minorities' or 'Müslüman olmayan azınlıklar' in the French, English and Turkish versions of the Treaty. Hence the Republic of Turkey's restrictive application of the relevant regulations in the Treaty of Lausanne represents a clear breach of the wording of the Treaty. This policy discriminates not only against numerous non-Muslim minorities that existed in Turkey at the time the Treaty of Lausanne was concluded – e.g. Syrian Orthodox or Roman Catholic Christians – but against all minorities affiliated with Islam, particularly Turkey's largest religious minority, the Alevi.

The discussion on the situation of religious minorities in Turkey, which has only begun in the recent past, i.e. since the Treaty of Lausanne – with these minorities including the Jehovah's Witnesses, various evangelical free churches and the Baha'i – makes it clear that while the exclusive reference to the Treaty of Lausanne may well be signifi-



Nothing whatsoever has changed in regard to the fundamental problems affecting the legal situation of the non-Muslim Turkish minorities in question as a result of the changes in the relevant foundation law regulations as they impact the community foundations.

cant from the point of view of the Armenians, Greeks and Jews, who are regarded as non-Muslim minorities as defined by the Treaty of Lausanne, it is evident that references to this treaty are in no way appropriate when it comes to resolving fundamental issues facing all religious communities in Turkey in regard to the realisation of individual and collective religious freedom.

Such a solution can only occur on the basis of the relevant binding international conventions, to which Turkey is a party, specifically the European Convention on Human Rights, which Turkey signed on 4 November 1950 – some sixty years ago – and ratified on 18 May 1954.

The political discussion among interested circles in the European Union remains stron-

gly focused on this treaty when it comes to the problems of those non-Muslim minorities in Turkey that the Republic of Turkey regards as minorities as defined by the Treaty of Lausanne. This fact has contributed to a situation where relevant legislative developments in Turkey in recent years – those pertaining to foundation law, for example – are regarded as being highly positive, both in themselves and within the relevant context, and they have been treated in such a way as if these legislative measures had already brought about basic positive changes regarding the legal status of the corresponding Christian churches and/or Jewish communities.

In fact, nothing whatsoever has changed in regard to the fundamental problems affecting the legal situation of the non-Muslim

Turkish minorities in question as a result of the changes in the relevant foundation law regulations as they impact the community foundations. The Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Armenian Patriarchate as well as the Grand Rabbinate, like all other non-Muslim minorities to whom certain community foundations have been allotted, still have no legal personality and are thus legally non-existent. As a result, there are still no legal relations between the community foundations in question and the Christian churches and/or Jewish communities.

The fundamental problem facing both the previously named churches and the Jewish communities, as all other Christian churches as well – whether they already existed in Turkey before 1923 or only established themselves here in the recent past – is the lack of legal recognition, of a legal personality.

However, in this context it must be emphasised that this problem is also shared by Islam in Turkey. It is true that a quasi state-sponsored Sunni Islam is supervised, organised and promoted by an office that is under the authority of the prime minister. In practice, however, the officially banned but still existing Islamic orders, the new Islamic movements, and also the vast minority of the Alevi, who are also affiliated with Islam, have been left just as much up in the air as the non-Muslim minorities.

However, one should not ignore the fact that, due to fundamental changes in the laws governing associations and foundation law in accordance with efforts to harmonise these laws with European Commission guidelines, religious communities now have the possibility of establishing themselves as associations or foundations. Individual evangelical free churches have taken advantage of this possibility, as have individual Alevi associations, although it remains unclear whether these are religious or cultural bodies.

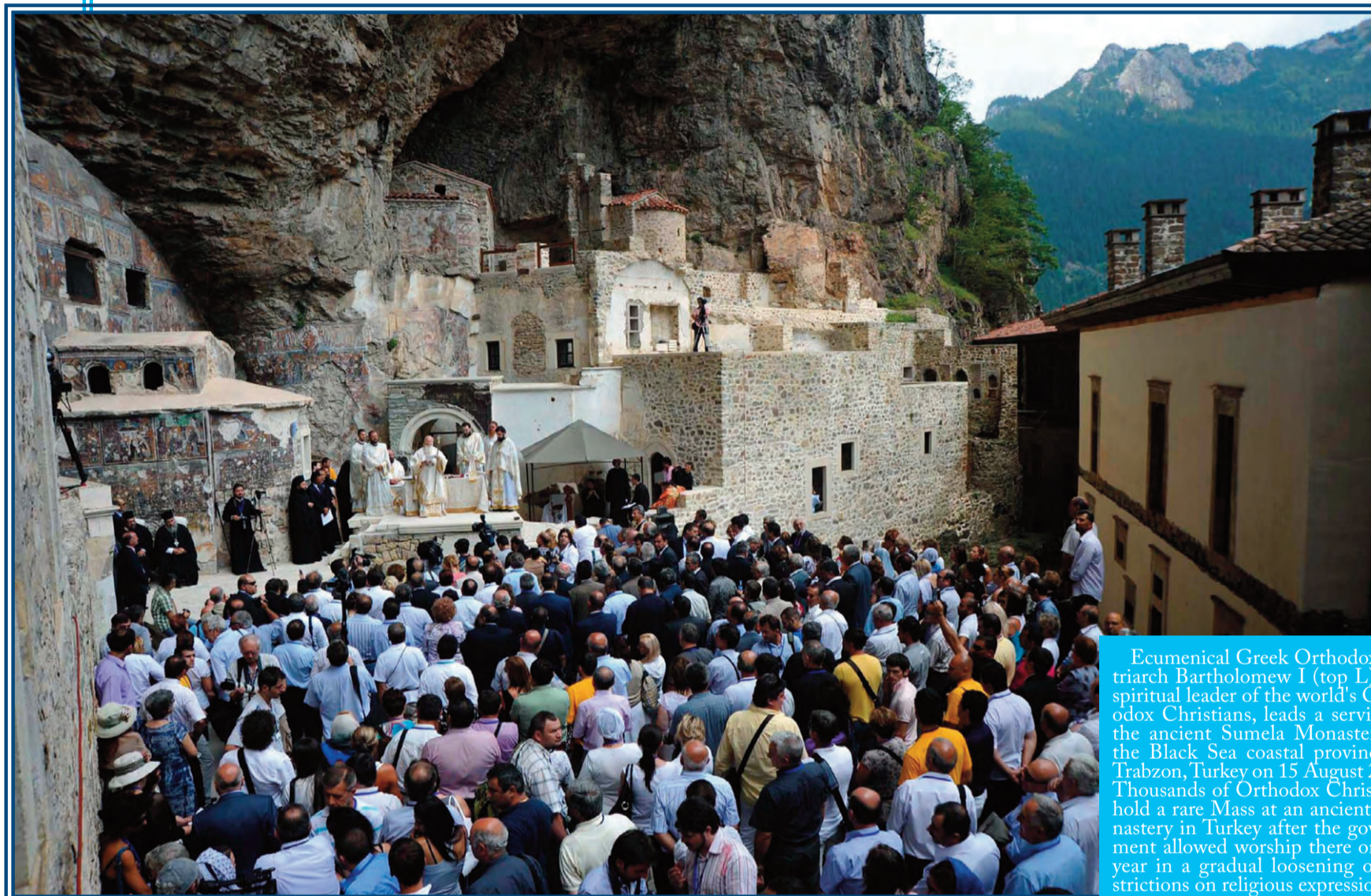
Nevertheless, the underlying problems can only be fundamentally solved if Turkey continues to develop its understanding of what it means to be a secular state in accordance with Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. For this to happen, it is first necessary to revise the constitution in accordance with Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and to pass the necessary subordinate legal regulations that regulate the legal existence and the basis of the activities of religious communities. Turkey must give up seeking Turkish solutions for Turkish problems. A Turkey that conceives of itself as a European Turkey must seek European solutions for Turkish problems. There is no doubt that this will remain difficult. Within this context, it is not only a matter of harmonising legal regulations with the relevant regulations of the European Convention on Human Rights. Instead, what is at stake is a new way of thinking that makes it possible for people to experience the individual and collective unfolding of their religious needs independent of their religious affiliation.



Democracy and religious freedoms in Turkey

by Sencer Ayata

Prof. Dr. Sencer Ayata is the director of the Science, Governance and Culture Platform of the Republican People's Party (CHP) of Turkey



Ecumenical Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I (top L), the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, leads a service at the ancient Sumela Monastery in the Black Sea coastal province of Trabzon, Turkey on 15 August 2010. Thousands of Orthodox Christians hold a rare Mass at an ancient monastery in Turkey after the government allowed worship there once a year in a gradual loosening of restrictions on religious expression.

ANA/EPA/MURAT KABAN TURKEY OUT

It has been eight years since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has come to power in Turkey. It is today unfortunate to see that after two terms of single party rule by the AKP, the situation concerning religious freedoms have not improved in the country. On the contrary, most domestic and international observers are alarmed more than ever concerning the current state and direction of fundamental rights and freedoms in Turkey. The European Commission, for example, stated in its 2008 progress report that "Turkey needs to make further efforts to create an environment conducive to full respect for freedom of religion in practice." Similar concerns can also be heard in reports of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the International Religious Freedom Report of the US Department of State. The vocal criticism that can be heard in numerous monitoring reports deeply concerns friends of Turkey about the direction that the country is heading with regard to rights and freedoms.

It is indeed difficult to comprehend the full scale of the problem in Turkey, if one limits his or her analysis to the level of religious freedoms. What we are ob-

serving in Turkey, even more acutely since the referendum of September 2010, is that democracy and the fundamental rights and freedoms associated with it, are coming under attack. Turkish citizens can no longer feel safe, whether concerning their political rights or religious freedoms, as the rule of law and checks and balances are gradually eroded. Each day, we see yet another move by the AKP that will lead to further concentration of power in government hands. It is only natural that religious freedoms are eroded in a country where the judiciary, the media, and civic associations no longer have the ability to limit and restrain government's power. As Turkish citizens increasingly refer to the Turkish political system as "the society of fear", there is growing worry about government intrusion into everyday life.

This alarming situation is precisely the reason why the Republican People's Party (CHP) has made "democracy" and "freedoms" the central pillars of its discourse and policy under the new leadership of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. Today, CHP is recognized by those on the left as well as the right of the Turkish political spectrum as the most credible democratic opposition with the potential to end AKP's

increasingly authoritarian rule. In its quest for democratic reform and full membership in the European Union, CHP has strengthened its alliance with the most progressive segments of the Turkish public to push not only for religious freedoms but also for women's rights and freedom of expression and association. It is our conviction that a wider mobilization for democracy is the only way to ensure religious freedoms. CHP, therefore, is committed more than ever to building the widest possible democratic coalition that will ensure that human rights and freedoms are respected in Turkey. We are fully aware of the challenges and difficulties that await CHP in the pursuit of greater democratic freedoms for all. AKP's discriminatory communitarian policies have fragmented the Turkish society more than ever. Conservatism, patriarchy, and intolerance seem to be the dominant values of the last eight years of AKP rule. Hate speech and hate crimes targeting religious minorities are on the rise. It is regrettable to observe that there is growing feeling of concern and insecurity among different religious communities around the country. Turkey's foreign policy priorities and goals closely resemble

the policy at home. Prime Minister Erdoğan and his colleagues continue to perceive the world through the lens of "civilizations". As religion becomes the determining pillar of Turkish foreign policy, the country no longer seems to be committed to the universal values that unite us all as human beings. Friends of Turkey are increasingly alarmed to see that the "axis shift" of the country separates it from the Western world and values.

CHP, fully aware of the difficulties and obstacles it faces, is ready more than ever to stand up for the challenge. As the political party that initiated Turkey's integration to the European community, we pursue fundamental rights and freedoms not simply to receive favourable reviews in various monitoring reports, but because these values are the defining elements of who we are as social democrats. CHP's party cadres and electorate share the same strong commitment to respecting and embracing diversity, fully knowing that these are the fundamental values that make us all Europeans. We will continue to pursue unity in diversity in aiming to sustain Europe as the world's beacon of light concerning religious freedoms.

Substantial change is necessary

by *Mine Yildirim*

Mine Yildirim is a Researcher at AAbO Akademi, Institute for Human Rights and Member of the Committee on Religious Freedom and Legal Affairs of the Association of Protestant Churches (Turkey)



Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Change and democratization have been part of political discourse for some time and eagerness and determination for a new civil constitution in 2011 excite everyone in Turkey. The times ahead seem full of potential for better protection of human rights and realization of rule of law. Yet, serious challenges to full realization of freedom of religion or belief for all remain. Some basic demands of religious communities, actually, do not require a new constitution and could/should have been addressed within the existing legislation. Turkey has made clear commitments to freedom of religion or belief, as evident in Turkey's human rights commitments. These must be reflected in the domestic level with improvements for the realization of, inter alia, neutrality and impartiality of the state being fully and clearly reflected in policies concerning religion, equality for all citizens, interpretation and implementation of relevant legislation in compatibility with international standards of human rights and jurisprudence. A paradigmatic mentality shift towards securing pluralism is required. Sadly, a particular form of mentality pervades state institutions as well as society so as to convey a message that there is no room for members of certain religions or beliefs.

It is very important to set the standard right for religious freedom in Turkey. While many people in Turkey would consider themselves tolerant and affirm they respect the right to freedom of religion for everyone there would be problems in agreeing on what this right would entail. For instance, according to a survey conducted by Sabanci University (Religiosity in Turkey, 2009) 66% of those surveyed, believed that those of other religions should not be allowed to hold meetings open to the public in which they express their ideas. Clearly, there is

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An important need of the Protestant community is to be able to establish places of worship. Yet, this need seems destined to remain unmet, due to inadequate regulations and the inconsistent and restrictive decisions rendered by many civil servants.

need to understand and promote freedom of religion or belief in Turkey in line with the standards set by international law and jurisprudence. It is imperative that legislation and practice in this field be subject to scrutiny for compliance with international standards. Public decision makers and judges need to be trained for this purpose. Policies on pluralism in the fields of education, justice and state administration as well as local government level need to be formulated and implemented without delay. The latter is crucial for a change in mentality. Capacity building for religious communities will greatly increase their potential for monitoring their human rights situation and engaging in dialogue with authorities.

The situation of the Protestant community is a case in point, demonstrating that the steps proposed above are indispensable for improvement of religious freedom. The

intolerant attitudes towards them and their perception that they are not viewed as equal citizen, the problems in obtaining legal personality, the restrictions on establishing places of worship as well as discriminatory practices in the fields of education and employment and other problems illustrate the complex and comprehensive nature of their problems. The Protestant Community in Turkey numbers around 3,000-3,500 persons with around 100 church congregations. The only way the Protestant Community can obtain legal personality is by establishing associations. This has become possible after 2005. However, the procedures followed by the police and civil authorities in this sphere have been far from predictable, transparent or consistent.

An important need of the Protestant community is to be able to establish places of worship. Yet, this need seems destined to

remain unmet, due to inadequate regulations and the inconsistent and restrictive decisions rendered by many civil servants. The fate of existing churches is left entirely to the discretion of local governments and law enforcement officers thus increasing the vulnerability of the community.

There is no legal basis for Christians to train their clergy in an official educational institution. Christian and Jewish students have the right to be exempt from compulsory religion classes. However, some school principals are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the exemption and are not helpful, hence some children have to sit in the classroom during the class and are subjected to bad treatment from classmates and, in some cases, teachers. Exemption cannot be properly implemented due to the lack of pluralistic values. Sadly, being discriminated against is considered a normal part of everyday life. Discriminatory practices are encountered both individually and collectively.

It is widely thought by Protestants that the state, the media and the society in general harbor negative, skeptical and disparaging attitudes towards Protestants. It is a widely-held conviction among Protestants that the government does not view them as equal to other citizens. Although less in number compared to former years, broadcasts and programs presenting incorrect, negative material about Protestants continue to be produced. In the face of rhetoric about missionary activities, Protestants try to respond but feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness dominate.

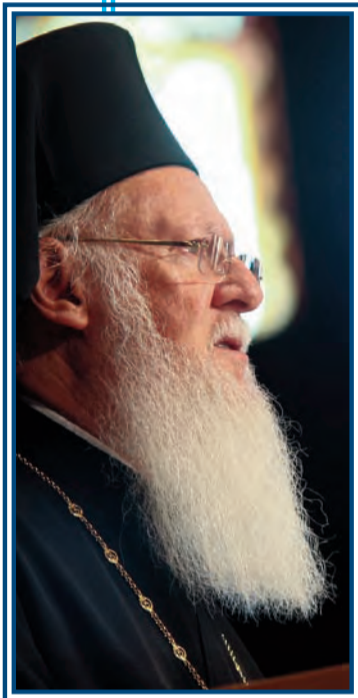
Members of all religions as well as unbelievers encounter problems related to freedom of religion or belief in Turkey and a comprehensive strategy addressing all of these problems needs to be formulated with participation of all belief communities.



Interfaith understanding and dialogue: A way to cross the bridge

by *Emre Öktem*

Dr. Emre Öktem, Associate professor of public international law, University of Galatasaray, Istanbul. Member of the Advisory Council for the Freedom of Religion and Belief (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe)



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ANA | EPA



Despite innumerable obstacles and opponents, the current landscape of interfaith dialogue in Turkey is colorful, rich and promising. Interfaith dialogue is not only an ethical obligation, it is a practical necessity.



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As a notion, interfaith dialogue encompasses scientific debates between theologians and other scholars; but also simple exchange of ideas, or sharing of feelings between ordinary people. In its broad sense, interfaith dialogue has an immemorial history. Today, interfaith dialogue is a sophisticatedly organized activity. Once upon a time, it was a natural, and probably unnoticed part of the social life.

Dialogue was always warmly welcome on Anatolian earth, qualified as the “religious reconciliation space”. Spiritual leaders such as Mevlana Jelaleddin Rumi and Saint Gregory Palamas, or monarchs such as the Sultans Orhan and Mehmed II the Conqueror, and the Emperors John Cantacuzenos and Manuel Paleologos were involved in interfaith exchanges by political necessity, intellectual curiosity or spiritual vocation. There has always been a mystical affinity between Orthodox monks and Muslim Sufis, who, in later periods, welcomed orientalist scholars from Europe. Not surprisingly, music was and is still a particularly inspiring ground of dialogue and collaboration.

Whilst religious dignitaries, scholars, musicians and statesmen discussed about intellectual subtleties, popular layers of the society were in contact also in the daily life. In today’s Istanbul, the holy springs of the Orthodox churches are still impressively active and largely frequented by Muslims.

The dialogue went on in early republican era and was particularly flourishing with the Catholic Church. Mgr. Roncalli, the Holy See’s “Apostolic Delegate”, established excellent relations with the republican authorities. Elected as the Pope with the name of John XXIII in 1958, Mgr. Roncalli became the architect of interfaith dialogue, encouraged henceforth by the Vatican II Council. Tur-

key was one of the first Muslim states to establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See, in 1951. Reciprocal visits by Turkish statesmen and Sovereign Pontiffs contributed to the development of Turco-Vatican relations.

In parallel to the Turkish « overture » abroad by mid-1980’s, the interfaith dialogue developed considerably and institutionally, with frequent interfaith meetings, reactivation of Christian holy shrines in Anatolia, interreligious prayers attended by the representatives of believers of three monotheistic religions. Governmental bodies, and particularly the Directorate of the Religious, gave their support to the promotion of such activities.

A crucial event in the history of interfaith dialogue in Turkey was Pope Benedict 16th’s visit on November 2006. The Sovereign Pontiff was welcomed by the Prime Minister and had meetings with civil and religious authorities, in particular with Patriarch Bartholomew. When back to the Vatican, the Holy Father expressed his gratitude to all those who organized his journey and addressed his “special thought to Turkish authorities and to the friendly People of Turkey, who reserved for me, a welcome worthy of his traditional hospitable spirit.”

Academic collaboration has become an integral part of the interreligious dialogue in Turkey since mid-1980’s with the exchange of scholars and students as well as the organization of joint conferences. Turkish civil society too is getting deeply involved in interfaith dialogue.

His All-Holiness Bartholomew has played a prominent role in the development of interfaith activities. The Patriarch had already manifested his desire of dialogue: “Christians, -and particularly Orthodox Christians should ally with the authentic Islam in order to surpass modernity ‘from in-

side’, by a new cultural mutation. Together, Ensemble, they would remind the irreducible character of the human person, ‘image of God’ for Christians, His khalifa for Muslims”.

Governmental entities as well as private actors are also promoting “faith tourism” which provides a favorable ground for interfaith dialogue activities. Many Muslims join the pilgrimage processions “on the footsteps of Saint Paul” as an opportunity of dialogue with their Christian friends and to share their spiritual experience. At the occasion of Faith Tourism Days II, held in Izmir in 2004, His All Holiness Bartholomew declared: “Faith tourism aims at strengthening and deepening the bonds between believers and the places they visit and the religious personalities of the past. Faith tourism has not only geographical significance but also cultural significance”

Despite innumerable obstacles and opponents, the current landscape of interfaith dialogue in Turkey is colorful, rich and promising. Interfaith dialogue is not only an ethical obligation, it is a practical necessity. In the nowadays world that is being called the “global village” no nation has the luxury to shut itself at home.

In its persistent ambition to join the EU, Turkey cannot ignore the Judeo-Christian roots of European civilization. But these roots have no cultural monopoly in Europe. Islam is a part of both historical and current European culture. The numerous Muslims communities living in almost all EU countries are now an integral part of today’s Europe’s plurality. In its European vocation, Turkey is predestinated to play a crucial role in the relations between religions, especially between Christianity and Islam.

The irresistible temptation to meet the other may lead to the discovery of a rich legacy of common values and concepts, which

eclipse preconceived differences and divergences. Muslim and Christian scholars and religious men may disagree on many issues of abstract theology. When engaged in a sincere and genuine dialogue, they are always surprised to discover more and more convergences in the daily understanding of the relationship between the Creator and the created.

Dialogue and mutual understanding are common values of ours; and we often commit the naïve mistake of thinking that these values enjoy overall sharing. The raison d’être of some political and social movements is conflict, friction, polemics. They are fed back by violent discourse end enmity. Dialogue helps solve problems, paves the way to understanding and reconciliation: therefore, no surprise that dialogue is not welcomed by those who benefit from the persistence of problems. Our nations’ respective histories offer bad examples to avoid and good ones that inspires us when we are called to built our common future. History should instill wisdom, not revenge. We should not forget that we belong to our respective nations for the fraction of second that is our lifetime, and we remains morally responsible for the eternity. At this point, be it allowed to a Muslim to quote Pope John Paul II: “There is no peace without justice and there is no justice without forgiveness.”

Dialogue is a challenge for accepting religious, denominational and cultural pluralism, as a source of richness, that cannot be renounced to, an opening towards the external world and a means to enrich human experience or the bases of a democratic society. Christians and Muslims have much to learn from each other. They can challenge each other to live in rectitude and to realize in practice the great spiritualities and ethics that they continually preach.



Separate but unequal citizens

by Robert Ellis

Robert Ellis is a regular commentator on Turkish affairs and advisor to the Turkey Assessment Group in the European Parliament

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Christian churches and monasteries in the occupied areas in the north (of Cyprus) have been devastated, vandalized and looted, not only with the cooperation of the Turkish army but also, on occasion, with the connivance of the UN authorities.



Turkish riot policemen walk in front of Hagia Sophia.

ANA/EPA/TOLGA BOZOGU

Almost 1200 years of Christian civilisation in what is now known as Turkey came to an end with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. The much lauded millet system which followed, by which the religious communities were allowed to rule themselves, was in fact a system of 'separate but unequal'. Sharia law prevailed, and the status of the Christian or Jewish dhimmi ("protected people") was inferior both legally and in everyday life.

The Christian presence in Turkey was effectively terminated with the First World War.

Both the Greek and Armenian populations were depleted through massacres and deportation as well as the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey.

The Greek inhabitants of Istanbul and two Greek islands, totalling 200,000, were exempt from this exchange, but restrictions imposed by the Turkish government in 1932 on their commercial activities, a punitive wealth tax imposed on non-Muslims in 1942 and the Istanbul pogrom in 1955, have reduced the Greek population of Turkey today to between three and four thousand. The Lausanne Treaty (1923), which provides the legal basis for the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, guarantees religious freedom for non-Muslim minorities and, furthermore, "an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education". Nevertheless, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the spiritual head of 300 million Orthodox Christians round the world, feels beleaguered and, as he put it in an interview with CBS, sometimes crucified. Turkey has refused to recognise his ecumenical status and the legal personality of the Patriarchate, which makes it difficult to administer its

own property. However, the European Court of Human Rights has in a ruling determined that the orphanage on the island of Büyükada (Prinkipos), which was confiscated by the Turkish state, should be returned to its legal owner, the Patriarchate.

Furthermore, since 1971 the Greek Orthodox seminary on the island of Heybeliada (Halki) has been closed after a law banning private higher education. As a result, it is no longer possible to train Greek Orthodox priests, as they must have Turkish nationality. In an interview with the Turkish daily Milliyet Patriarch Bartholomew said the Patriarchate was dying from lack of oxygen.

There are now 60,000 Armenians and 25,000 Jews remaining in Turkey, and in addition 24,000 Christian Syrians, who suffered the same fate as the Armenians during the First World War. The Syriac Orthodox Church is fighting a legal battle against the Turkish authorities, who are trying to confiscate part of the land belonging to Saint Gabriel's monastery, founded in 397, which is among the oldest in the world.

Although the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership include respect for and protection of minorities, which Turkey defines on a religious and not an ethnic basis, the gestures Turkey has hitherto made are more of a token nature. For example, allowing a mass to be held once a year at the Sümela monastery on the Black Sea coast, or the recent mass held at the Armenian Church of the Holy Cross in Van (but still without a cross on its dome).

In a study conducted by Istanbul's Bahcesehir University last year, half the Turks polled said that they didn't want Christian neighbours, and it must be admitted Christians are not popular in Turkey. Witness the three Christians who had their throats slit in Malatya three years ago, Father Andrea Santoro who was

murdered in Trabzon (where Hrant Dink's killer also came from) and Bishop Luigi Padovese, who was murdered in Iskenderun in June. And according to the indictment in the ongoing Ergenekon case, Turkish Special Operations planned to terrorize and attack the non-Muslim population in order to incriminate the AKP government.

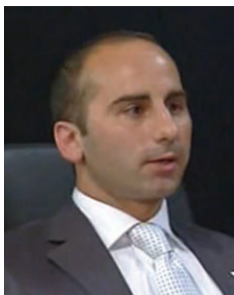
Cyprus

Turkey's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, has explained that Turkey's multifaceted foreign policy rests on four pillars, one of which is cultural harmony and mutual respect. When it concerns Cyprus, where Christianity was already established in 45 AD, Turkish practice falls short of Professor Davutoglu's ideal.

As has been well documented, for example, in the 2009 report by the Helsinki Commission, Christian churches and monasteries in the occupied areas in the north have been devastated, vandalized and looted, not only with the cooperation of the Turkish army but also, on occasion, with the connivance of the UN authorities.

Over 500 churches, chapels and monasteries have been confiscated and put under the control of Evkaf, the Moslem religious trust.

Their former congregations and priests have been reduced to the role of supplicants and, subject to the whim of the Turkish authorities, are on occasion allowed to worship at their holy shrines. In 1971, when the former Swedish prime minister Oluf Palme visited Zambia, he referred to the Zambezi river, which separated Zambia from Rhodesia (where the white minority regime had unilaterally declared independence), as "the border of human decency." The same could be said of the Green Line in Cyprus.



The Sincerity of Turkey's Democracy?

The Case of the Indigenous Aramean (Syriac) People

by Johnny Messo

Johnny Messo is President of the Syriac Universal Alliance



Syriac-Orthodox St. Akhsnoyo church at Midyat, Turkey



The Arameans, above all, ask for equal citizenship, based on a new constitution that meets the standards of the EU and which laws will effectively be implemented. They strive for the recognition of their people and historic presence in Southeast Turkey. They ask not to be treated as foreigners or as a fifth-column by Turkish society, led by the mainstream media and biased textbooks.

From the outside, today's Turkey appears as if it differs markedly from yesterday's Turkey. However, one should always bear in mind that not everything that shines is gold. As a result of the decision made in December 2004 by the European Union (EU) to start the accession negotiations with Turkey, the recent years have witnessed a series of widely acclaimed reform packages and constitutional amendments in this ever more de-Christianized, Islamified state.

Despite these developments, most experts agree that Turkey still has a long way to go in order to achieve "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities." In the case of the Aramean people, this part of the Copenhagen criteria, which form the basis in the negotiation process with candidate countries since 1993, exposes Turkey's apparent lack of commitment to Europe's values.

1. The Aramean (Syriac) People of Turkey

Most politicians, journalists, writers and activists are not familiar with the Aramean people and their historical presence in Southeast Turkey. Briefly, five facts are worth stressing:

1.1 Indigenous: Contrary to the Turks and the Kurds, who as latecomers are foreign to Southeast Turkey, the Arameans and their Aramaic language are indigenous to this countryside, as corroborated by written evidence dating back to the 12th century B.C.

1.2 People: Rather than a religious community, the Arameans are a people or stateless nation, and this is how their vast majority increasingly perceive and call themselves. In Turkey, the ethno-religious Arameans historically consist of the Syriac (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), Chaldean and Nestorian (or: 'Assyrian') communities.

1.3 Name: The Syriac Orthodox Patriarch aptly wrote about the synonymy of their names: "The Syriac language is the Aramaic

language itself, and the Arameans are the Syrians themselves. He who has made a distinction between them has erred." There exists an academic consensus on this issue, as there also is one that states that 'Assyrian' is a historically unfounded and politicized name that was invented in the 19th century.

1.4 Diaspora: As a result of systematic ethnic cleansing, land theft, persecutions and discrimination by the Turkish State, often with the help of Kurdish auxiliaries, the Arameans fled from their homeland. Today some 25,000 Arameans reside in Turkey, among whom circa 2,500 souls have remained in Southeast Turkey. The number of Aramean Europeans substantially exceeds the number of Arameans in this region.

1.5 Leadership: In the diaspora, particularly in Europe, the Arameans have tasted the delights of true democracy, freedom and equal citizenship. In the secularized and free West, secular organizations emerged in addition to the churches and monasteries aiming at organizing, defending and representing the Aramean people and their rights.

2. The Aramean Question in Turkey

The Aramean Question in Turkey consists of past and present cases of many human rights violations which have never been addressed by Turkey or the international community. Due to limited space, only four sub-questions will be mentioned. Rather than elaborating them, as experts have done many times before, it has been decided to ask Turkey reasonable questions which represent the voice and the desire of the Aramean people. It is hoped that this will initiate an official dialogue with the Turkish Government, conceivably coordinated by the EU.

2.1 Lack of Recognition & Legal Status

1. What is Turkey's position on recognizing the Arameans as a 'minority', in conformity with international law and the Lausanne Treaty from 1923, much like the Greeks, Armenians and Jews, so that they are

allowed to establish their own schools, teach their Aramaic language and freely practice their Christian faith?

2. What is Turkey's view on recognizing the Arameans as an 'indigenous people', in keeping with the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples signed by Turkey in 2007 and explicitly stated in Resolution 1704 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe?

2.2 Illegal Land Occupation

3. What is Turkey's stance towards the continuation of the illegal expropriation by the State of huge amounts of land historically and legally belonging to the Arameans, as affirmed by the European Union and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe?

4. When will Turkey end the delays of court cases, noted by the European Court of Human Rights Annual Report 2009, that Aramean monasteries, villages and proprietors are facing?

2.3 Endangered Aramaic Cultural Heritage

5. Is the Turkish Government willing to take any responsibility in restoring, safeguarding, developing and promoting the endangered Aramaic cultural heritage of Southeast Turkey?

6. Is the Turkish Government prepared to assist and facilitate the Arameans who originate from Turkey in preserving their threatened language, culture and identity?

2.4 Return Migration: The Future of Tur-Abdin

7. Is Turkey ready to invest structurally in its south-eastern terrain, above all in improving the security, infrastructure and facilities for normal life circumstances there that may draw Aramean refugees back to the land of their ancestors?

8. Can Turkey ensure that the Tur-Abdin region in Southeast Turkey remains populated by its original Aramean inhabitants in the next decades, if not centuries?

3. The ball is in Turkey's court

The Arameans have an ancient history in Turkey and are one of the oldest Christian peoples in the world. Despite genocide, mistreatment and discrimination, they have always remained loyal and peaceful citizens. Noting that the Christian Arameans have fled from their homeland and in the past decades have frequently expressed the desire to be officially recognized by the Turkish Government as a 'minority', according to the Lausanne Treaty, in order to obtain a legal status so that they can start building up a future in their ancestral land, Turkey can now demonstrate how sincere its commitments to the values and principles of the EU truly are.

The Arameans, above all, ask for equal citizenship, based on a new constitution that meets the standards of the EU and which laws will effectively be implemented. They strive for the recognition of their people and historic presence in Southeast Turkey. They ask not to be treated as foreigners or as a fifth-column by Turkish society, led by the mainstream media and biased textbooks. In fact, Turkey should embrace and integrate the native Arameans as an ambitious people who can enrich it culturally, intellectually, spiritually and economically. With their experience in the Western diaspora, the Arameans may even become beneficial to Turkey in assisting Turkish society in the continuing process of democratization.

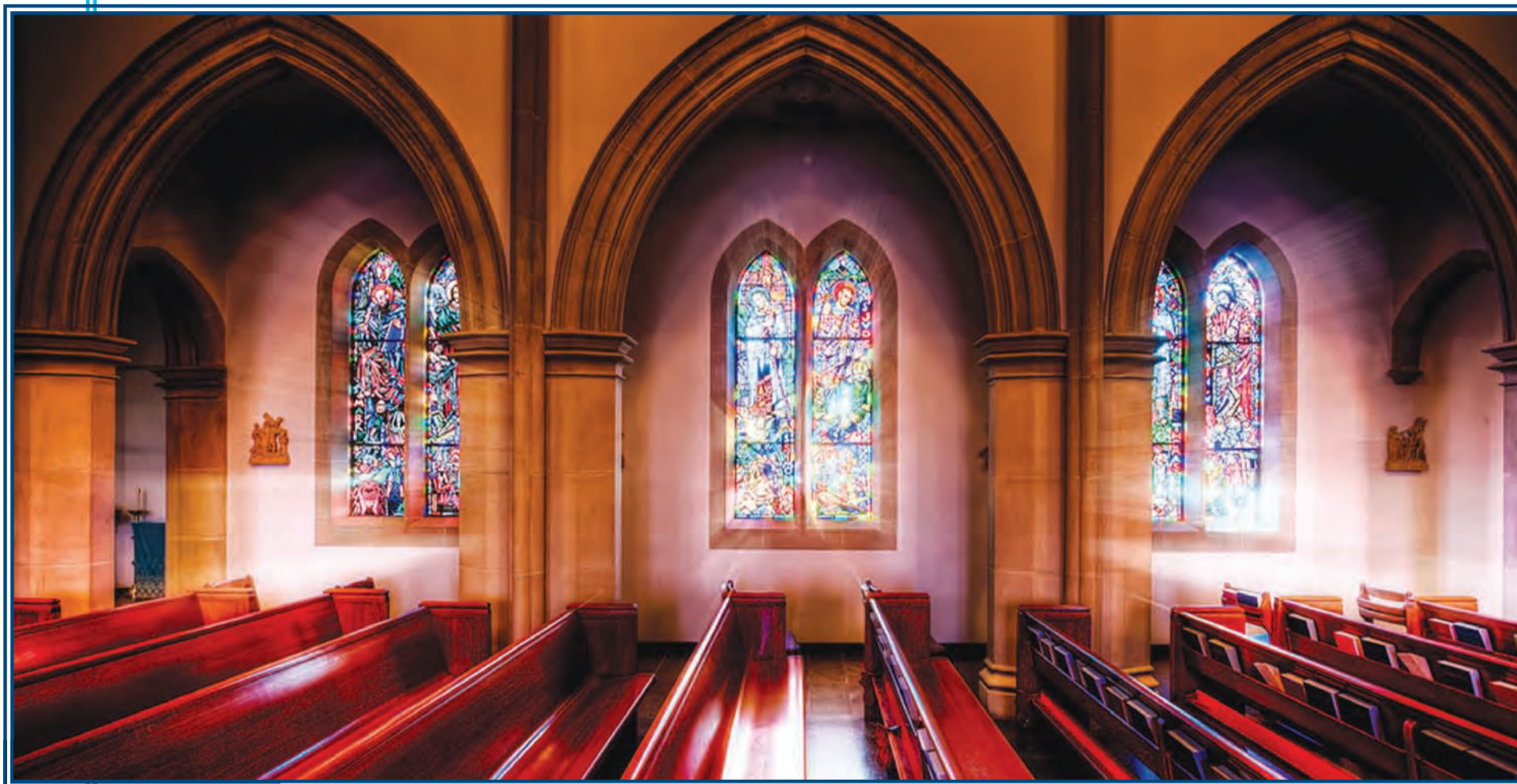
Between the seventh and tenth centuries A.D., the Arameans brought the Mesopotamian and Greek sciences to the Arabs who later exported this knowledge to Europe. Perhaps with their Christian background and as a people that has integrated most successfully in European countries, the Arameans may once again form a bridge between two civilizations, this time between Turkey and the EU. In any case, the ball of democratization is in Turkey's court.



Religious freedom; economy and politics

by *Dionyssi Kefalacos*

Dionyssi Kefalacos is the Editor-in-Chief of New Europe



Flickr - Greg Westfall



The latest attempts to ban “the scarf” worn by Muslim women in public places to, is the result of a neurotic European reaction to Muslim militancy. Nothing more than that.

Over the past centuries the demand for religious freedom had spearheaded in Europe a long battle for other freedoms, which on many occasions was tantamount to national emancipation.

Europe has paid its dues to religious confrontations. It took the Hundred and the Thirty Year War along with a number of other bloody confrontations, to settle the matter; and the two main Christian dogmas in Western Europe, Catholicism and Protestantism, finally found a “modus Vivendi”, which lasts to this day. In countries like Germany and Belgium, the coexistence of those two Christian dogmas has set the standard for the rest of Europe. In Eastern Europe Christian Orthodoxy prevailed, while Judaism has flourished all over Europe, east and west alike, despite the atrocities before and during WW II.

Religious freedom though is not only a matter of the open staging of a number of ceremonial procedures. It is also about freedom to follow one’s ethical convictions in everyday life. Given that economic activities constitute the major part of people’s lives, ethical principles towards work and wealth play a crucial role in the way societies function. At the end of the day, religious freedom may open the

way to economic freedom. For one thing the specialization of the European Jewish community in the trade of money (banking), has to be accredited to religious reasons.

More generally speaking religious convictions play an important role in the way certain societies develop their economic ideology. For example, Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants differ in the way they approach the ideas of work and wealth. Protestants have come to be more prone to hard work than the people of the other two Christian convictions.

The same is true for the accumulation of wealth. Those of the Jewish and Protestant faiths tend to favor wealth more than Catholic and Orthodox believers. As a result, market economies flourish more freely in Protestant societies, which also favor more than others the idea of personal responsibility in view of the difficulties of life.

Today however those differences tend to diminish drastically in the Judea-Christian world. Globalization has helped the development of a common liberal economic ideology all over the western world. By the same token differences between the Christian dogmas tend to disappear.

In any case Christianity is now al-

most free of prejudices towards other religions. The latest attempts to ban “the scarf” worn by Muslim women in public places to, is the result of a neurotic European reaction to Muslim militancy. Nothing more than that.

Invariably, however, terrorist actions by small groups are being dressed with a religious cover, in a way that it is denied by the mainstream societies. Those militant groups are just exploiting a variety of economic problems in the populous Muslim societies or their religious convictions, to support their cause.

The truth is that their real targets are very political and not at all religious. The outcome is however that Muslim societies appear today much less tolerant to other convictions than Christianity.

In any case, both the Christian and the Muslim worlds appear less liberal than some twenty years ago. Unfortunately this new separation of our world does not appear to be receding.

On the contrary is gaining momentum mainly in the Middle East. And it is not all clear if the right thinking people on both sides are going to win the game or rather if the warmongers on both sides are to prevail.



What's so funny about peace, love and understanding?

by *Andy Carling*

Andy Carling is a New Europe EU Affairs Editor



Spyros Paloukis | www.spyrospaloukis.com

In 1775, just before the birth of the United States, and two years after the Boston Tea Party, British lexicographer Samuel Johnston declared that “Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel”. Today, after hearing the modern day Tea Party, it appears that religion may be the first refuge of the scoundrel.

The problem is that nobody actually knows the thoughts of the Almighty, but some people fancy that they have privileged access to this information.

Take the invasion of Iraq. George Bush and Tony Blair, were guided by God to invade, whilst, those more traditionally considered to be on the receiving end of the Holy hotline were speaking out against such an attack. This included a cross-schism alliance of the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The obvious conclusion is that, either the Creator of All has a stranger and darker sense of humour than previously suspected, or some people confuse their own desires with divine instruction.

The latter is the more plausible. It has been said that the problem with religion isn't that God made Man in his image, but that Man has the tendency to make God in his image. So

often, people, especially those in the political sphere, find that they are doing God's work, and that they are also living in God's own country.

Who can argue with that? Not a sinful voter who went for the other candidate.

There can be nothing more dangerous than a political figure who believes they are doing God's will. Or are things slightly more complicated than that? The puzzle is that people react to faith in different ways. Martin Luther King Jr's faith enabled him to act with great courage, not on his behalf, but on a moral crusade, the rightness of which is accepted by all but the lunatic fringe.

Is this the same faith that produced Oral Roberts, Jim Bakker or even Sarah Palin? A God who believes in big guns and small taxes? It appears that the religious sentiment, that once produced great reformers has now switched sides.

We can look at the main branches of the Christian faith in the West. Both the Catholic Church and the Church of England have spent the last few decades tearing themselves apart over... women priests.

The justification for this is an arcane reading of theology, derived from interpretation of scriptures. The rest

of the world has moved on from these medieval injunctions.

In recent years various atheists, including leading top God botherer, Richard Dawkins, have argued the case against religion. How these books, or in some cases, polemics, are received is usually down to the reader's religious beliefs.

However, most of these books share a certain perspective.

The real target of the author's ire is not the existence of a divine being, but how religions, sects and cults have placed a rigid interpretation on spiritual teachings and then imposed them on others, frequently by using violence or psychological manipulation.

For religious tolerance to thrive, what needs to happen is for those who claim to be pronouncing God's judgement to learn a little humility and to understand that they could be wrong. After all, they have been proved wrong on many issues already, just ask Galileo.

As Martin Luther King jr said, “There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.”

When we understand this, the spiritual journey becomes something that unites us, rather than dividing us.

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The obvious conclusion is that, either the Creator of All has a stranger and darker sense of humour than previously suspected, or some people confuse their own desires with divine instruction.



Who goes to church on Sundays ?

by Alia Papageorgiou

Alia Papageorgiou writes New Europe's Eurocentrique column, and is former EU Affairs Editor of New Europe



Mass in progress inside Santa Maria Maggiore.

Flickr - Randy OHC



Do we come back to Democracy and the separation of powers? And how can this possibly apply to countries like China, Iran or even Turkey today?

Last Sunday morning, running through the Cinquantenaire Parc in Brussels I came around to the Rue de la Renaissance where it meets with Rue De L'Yser, on that spot there is a small church and some commotion captured my attention.

Quite a few people were entering, so I sneaked in to have a look at what goes on in a little church in what claims to be a very Catholic Country in Europe, (despite the alarming statistic of an 80 percent divorce rate) to see who was following that mass.

To my surprise (I had expected little old ladies fussing around charitable donations) the congregation was filled with young couples, young families and the best of all was the young organ player, not too far from the pews, playing her Sunday hymns and stopping to check her mobile phone in between sheet music changes.

In Europe today, it would seem that religious freedom is a non-event – a democratic cluster of nations, with common goals on human rights would obviously allow for freedom of religion. Doesn't it?

There are some slight exceptions but they are widely documented, (see the mosque building saga in Greece or the

minarets not allowed to surface any longer in Switzerland and it would take another 10 columns to describe what is going on in France so let's leave that aside) so, despite the growing conservatism which is not unusual in times of economic instability, as a whole Europe is a tolerant society. In an op-ed penned by Leonard A. Leo and Dr. Elizabeth H. Prodromou of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom the Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission respectively, point out that Germany is playing a key role (yes, in this too) in keeping our religious freedoms aligned with international treaties (despite having a strong presence of Religion within the State via the Christian Parties in the Bundestag).

"Chancellor Angela Merkel declared before a Protestant parliamentary working group in June that protection of religious freedom is an important part of its foreign policy and human rights efforts and stated that Germany "must act on behalf of human rights in all parts of the world." She also noted that, "We have no right to sit down after our own dignity has been protected and to no longer care what happens to the dignity of others."

This past week alone the

same commission asked of Secretary of State of the US Hillary Clinton to not sideline questions on religious freedom when dealing with China and their annual report and to maintain the importance of religious freedom.

The Sticking Point

Other nations across the globe tend to view religion as something that cannot be talked about in any negative way, a path which also seems dangerous as shown by the UN's stance to a more balanced approach when passing the "Defamation of religions" paperwork through the Security Council in 2009.

At the time, Germany speaking on behalf of the European Union said that, "The European Union does not see the concept of defamation of religion as a valid one in a human rights discourse."

The European Union believes that a broader, more balanced and thoroughly rights-based text would be best suited to address the issues underlying this draft resolution."

So how to counter the issue? Country by country? Region by Region? Or internationally? Do we come back to Democracy and the separation of powers? And how can this possibly apply to countries like China, Iran or even Turkey today?



God or not – freedom is freedom

by *Cillian Donnelly,*

Cillian Donnelly is a New Europe EU Affairs Editor

The European Union is an amalgamation of individual beliefs and philosophies inasmuch as it is an amalgamation of nation states; and theology, the basis for the foundation for one or other religion, has to be understood as a branch of philosophy. Therefore, we must content that religion constitutes a legitimate part of the philosophical make-up of the EU. It can be opposed; but it cannot be dismissed.

Religion, for want of a better phrase, is a man-made concept. That is, religious tenets are constantly being reappraised and interpreted by learned councils, such as the Vatican and the General Synod, and are as much a product of a continuing shift in political and societal changes as anything else. This is not to undermine religion as somehow subordinate to secularism, but instead a testament to the those who chose to not to follow the fundamentalist path, and who wish to see their own belief adapted and made relevant to contemporary society. There is an increasing trend to see secularism, agnosticism or atheism as somehow opposed to the dominant beliefs of the established religions that exist in Europe today: you are either one of them or one of us. It's the new kind of sectarianism.

Jonathan Sacks, the UK's Chief Rabbi, once said in a BBC television interview that (and this is a paraphrase) being a religious person is not a necessity for today's living, but it helps. What Lord Sacks was getting at is that day to day moral or philosophical decisions, be they at work, home or out on the street, are best made by those who have been touched by some sort of spiritual upbringing. These thoughts can be private, and need not be intrusive on public life. Religious belief can be a personal thing; it helps the believer cope with the traumas and struggles of day-to-day living.

Sacks, of course, was standing up for his own particular spirituality. Crucially, he never denied that opposition to belief should be put down, and per-

fectly put secularism into the philosophical realm of theology as opposed to the dogmatic trend of certain Christian beliefs. Sacks acknowledges atheism only to repudiate, but not deny, it.

His point is debatable of course – but that is the point; theology is arguable, and whether you want to talk about a particular interpretation of the scriptures, Talmud or Qur'an, or about the existence of a supreme being, the freedom has to be there to do so. Religious freedom goes both ways. Not everyone is as fundamentally religious as they once were, but the upswing towards secularism should not be an invitation to an all-out war between believers and non-believers.

But it is true that the religious grip is departing from politics and society in the western world; theocracy is out, secularism is in. But those enemies of organised religion who want to prod away at the chink in the armour, hoping to subject the beast to a humiliating and elongated death assume they are part of a them-and-us dichotomy. Religious fundamentalists as well as militant atheists perpetuate this stand-off; one is used to the dogma of the other. Reasonable men in the middle, such as Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King, Jonathan Sacks or Rowan Williams (whose reconciliation work has often gone misunderstood) are too often being squeezed out.

The trap that some of the secular-humanists appear to have fallen into is the same as that as their age old opponents. Believing that they are right, and having faith in the importance of their own particular message, they are, like the religious dogmatists, set in their ways, closed-minded and incapable of entering into a debate with those who do not agree with them, leading to what has been called "a dialogue of the death".

They have a point in that Judea-Christian philosophies and morals still dominate the EU, but the creeping fear that religious law (despite in some cases) will



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continue to engulf and emasculate Europe is unfounded.

Atheism, humanism, secularism or however it is to be categorised, has its place in modern Europe. When the EU constitution (the precursor to the Lisbon Treaty) was being prepared and debated, one of the early arguments was whether or not god should be mentioned in the preamble. It was a ridiculous idea. Religion and politics should never be lumped together; and a religious Union does not speak to all people, in the same way that a religious member state cannot be all inclusive to its own citizens.

Whether or not god exists is a continuing philosophical debate. That morality should be a personal thing, tied to a religious belief or not, should not be in the hands of the state. Religion should never be dictated by a shadowy religio-political cabal. That does not mean that secularism should pounce on the opportunity to take down state structures only to replace them with their own set of assumptions. If religion has no place in politics; then secularism should not be allowed to assume it is the heir to a philosophical vacuum.

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Muslims also have the right to practice their religion

by *Thomas Hammarberg*

Thomas Hammarberg is Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg



September 11th, 2010 marked 9th anniversary of the World Trade Center attacks. Events included 9th Commemoration ceremony and the Emergency Mobilization Against Racism and Anti-Muslim Bigotry rally.

Should the religious practices for Muslims in our country be “seriously limited”? This question was asked in a public opinion survey in Germany recently. The reported result was that no less than 58 per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement.

This is worrying. To be able to practice one’s religion is a human right – a right with no distinction between different faiths, for instance Christianity, Judaism or Islam.

Interestingly, there were huge regional differences in the responses to the German survey. In the eastern parts of the country – with a much smaller Muslim population – support for the statement was as high as 76 per cent. Distance and ignorance tend to increase suspicions.

This appears to be a general phenomenon: lack of knowledge feeds prejudices. Here the political leaders have a particular responsibility – too many of them have failed to counter Islamophobic stereotypes.

Of course, this became more difficult after the terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid, London, Amsterdam and also Beslan and Moscow.

However, the emotions caused by these horrible crimes called for systematic efforts to establish a distinction between the evildoers and the overwhelming majority of Muslims. These efforts were rarely made.



Neither has sufficient priority been given to analysing what makes some people listen to hateful propaganda against Muslims. Part of the explanation appears to be the same ignorance, fear and frustration which have caused bigotry against Roma and immigrants in general.

Unemployment and other consequences of the economic crisis appear to have provoked an increased insecurity.

We have learnt that minorities are sometimes turned into scapegoats by people

who feel alienated and ignored by those in power. There are certainly other reasons as well and it is essential to seek the relevant explanations.

Recent elections have seen extremist political parties gaining ground after aggressively Islamophobic campaigns. Even more worrying is the inertia or confusion which seems to have befallen the established democratic parties in this situation. Compromises are made which tend to give an air of legitimacy to crude prejudi-

ces and open xenophobia.

The anti-Muslim rhetoric tend to be combined with racist attitudes – directed not least against people originating from Turkey, Arab countries and South Asia. Muslims with this background are discriminated in the labour market and the education system in a number of European countries.

Reports from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and others have shown that persons with this background tend to be targeted by police in repeated identity controls and intrusive searches. This is certainly a human rights problem.

The diverse groups of Muslims are now also blamed by politicians in some countries for not “assimilating”. However, integration is a two-way process based on mutual understanding.

Anti-Muslim bigotry has in fact become a major obstacle to respectful relationships.

Indeed, the Islamophobic atmosphere has probably been a factor enabling extremists in some cases to recruit young and embittered individuals who lack a sense of belonging.

Instead of discussing such problems seriously, we have had a debate about methods to penalise women wearing the niqab and to prevent the building of minarets. This is hardly the way to give depth to our European values.



"Freedom of Religion"

Intercultural and interreligious dialogue in Europe

by *Rodi Kratsa*

Rodi Kratsa is vice-President of the European Parliament, from Greece, member of the European People's Party



The minaret of a mosque and a church with a crucifix are pictured in downtown Istanbul.

ANA/EPA/TOIGA BOZOGU

The EU has been a community of cultures and values built on the principle of respect of human rights and the diversity of its people ever since its establishment 50 years ago. As the founding father Jean Monnet stated in his memoirs «Nous ne coalisons pas des Etats, nous unissons des hommes.» (We are not joining states together, we are uniting people). In the frame of this project, intercultural dialogue will always retain its importance for the European Cohesion for the successful enlargement. This idea lies behind the motto of the EU "United in Diversity".

The growing cultural and religious diversity of our societies, as a result of migratory movements to Europe, the effects of globalisation and the growing exchanges of Europe with the rest of the world have resulted in more frequent and deeper interactions between cultures, languages, ethnic groups and religions and in different perceptions.

It is undeniable that freedom of religion is a valuable substance to democratic society and the European integration. This right is being officially mentioned at European level in Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union embodied in the Lisbon Treaty, on Freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Moreover, Article 22 of the Charter states that "The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity".

However, respect to religion and the freedom of religion does not go without saying. At the article-by-article explanatory note of the Charter, limitations to the right of article 10, in accordance with article 9(2) of the European Convention on Human Rights of the Council of Europe, are provided for: "Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others." This European stance is further supported by the

Council of Europe White Paper mentioned above, which states as one of the conditions of intercultural dialogue that "ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic affiliations or traditions cannot be invoked to prevent individuals from exercising their human rights or from responsible participating in society...Religious practice is part of contemporary human life and it therefore cannot and should not be outside the sphere of interest of public authorities...". These limitations express the core European values and principles and have been at the centre of the debate in Europe during the recent years, leading some to talk about a 'clash of civilizations', for those who are not aware or do not wish to understand Europe and its values.

Recent debates arising within European societies on issues like the application of Sharia'h law on family and inheritance law as well as on divorce claims, the practice of female genital mutilation, "honor killings", the use of the burqa and niqāb and, even further, the building of minarets and issues involving freedom of expression are issues demonstrating the link among religious freedom, gender equality, Human rights and European values. However, the respect of these values seem to be non-negotiable if the European Union wants to remain faithful to the official and legal obligations and the core of inalienable human rights provided for in the European treaties and legislation, applicable to all European citizens and immigrants present on European soil.

The European Parliament and especially the EPP (European People's Party) has a long experience in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. During the "European Year of Intercultural Dialogue" in 2008, the EPP organised several events, such as the Hearing on Cultural Diversity, Religions and Dialogue (10 January 2008), the Hearing on Women and Spirituality (13 November 2008) and the Hearing European Values, Regional Identity and Intercultural Dialogue

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(11 December 2008). Also, in the framework of the above-mentioned European Year, Official Visitors to the Plenary sessions included high-level religious personalities such as Patriarch Bartholomew, Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth, Sheikh Ahmad Badr El Din El Hassoun, Grand Mufti of Syria and also Asma Jahangir, UN's Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The European Parliament in its inter-parliamentary relations with all Parliaments of the world, and with its delegations' attendance in regional parliamentary assemblies, highlights the importance of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in its political agenda.

Cultural diversity, European, national and regional identity, religious tolerance, human rights are interlinked concepts and values in our unique Europe. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue are essential tools in bringing these concepts together and in forging closer links among people living in Europe and with people beyond our borders. The harmony of these concepts is a condition sine qua non to achieve freedom and prosperity in Europe and in the whole world.



Limitations on religions freedom have 'chilling effect'

by Heiner Bielefeldt

Heiner Bielefeldt is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Freedom of religion or belief has a broad scope of application. It protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. It also includes members of newly established communities, minority groups as well as minorities within minorities. In addition, protection must also be accorded to those who have exercised, or wish to exercise, the right to change their religious affiliation, which constitutes an inherent and essential part of everyone's freedom of religion or belief.

Unfortunately, there are many examples of exclusion of people from the enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief. In some countries recognition of religious practice is by definition limited to a particular list of religions, with the result that members of other religions or beliefs face problems, for instance when applying for official documents.

Small communities, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, Ahmadis, Falun Gong and others are sometimes stigmatized as "cults" and frequently meet with societal prejudices which may escalate into fully fledged conspiracy theories. Moreover, those who have exercised their right to convert to another religion or belief are not only confronted with negative reactions from society at large; in some countries they are also exposed to criminal prosecution. Further, as a result of a conversion, marriages have been nullified against the will of the concerned couple and persons have been excluded from the right to inheritance.

Equality constitutes a cornerstone of human rights in general, also deriving from their universal nature. Thus article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stresses that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". As a result of this egalitarian spirit underlying human rights, States are obliged to combat all forms of discrimination. In the context of freedom of religion or belief, I would like to briefly refer to two forms of discrimination: discrimination against religious minorities and gender-based discrimination.

Members of religious minorities, including atheistic and non-theistic minorities, typically live in situations of increased vulnerability. In many countries, religious minorities face discriminatory obstacles in the education system, labour market or when accessing the public health infrastructure. The formal exclusion of minorities from certain positions within the State apparatus is a widespread phenomenon, sometimes even enshrined in legal statutes or the State's constitution. According to numerous reports, members of minorities also bear an additional risk of falling victim to police harassment or profiling. This is especially likely if societal stereotypes



brand members of certain religious communities as "dangerous", "hostile" or even potential "terrorists". In some countries, religious minorities regrettably face insurmountable obstacles when trying to construct or renovate visible places of worship, such as churches, mosques, pagodas, synagogues or temples.

As Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief I also address gender perspectives.

In the context of religion, gender-based discrimination has at least two distinct dimensions. Women belonging to discriminated communities often suffer at the same time from gender-based discrimination. Equally, religious traditions or interpretations of religious doctrine sometimes appear to justify, or even call for, discrimination against women.

One example of the former constellation is the ban on the headscarf which

adversely affects Muslim women who, from a religious conviction, decide to wear the hijab. In some countries this may lead to expulsion from schools and universities or discrimination in the labour market.

However, freedom to publicly manifest one's religious conviction by displaying visible symbols constitutes an inherent part of freedom of religion or belief. Any limitations to the freedom to publicly manifest one's religion or belief must be prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. The fundamental objective must be to protect both the positive freedom to manifest one's religious conviction as well as the negative freedom not to be exposed to any pressure to display religious symbols or perform religious activities.

The second constellation of gender related discrimination follows from the experience that religious traditions are at times invoked to deny or dilute the equality in rights of men and women. Some members of religious communities claim that traditional justifications of gender related discrimination stem from cultural contexts rather than belonging to the substance of the religious teaching.

Whatever the justification, all practices contrary to women's rights should be condemned and combated. Ample evidence indicates that women frequently face discrimination in the application of religious laws. It can no longer be taboo to demand that women's rights take priority over intolerant beliefs that are used to justify gender discrimination.

States are obliged not merely to respect freedom of religion or belief but also to actively protect such a freedom against undue interference from third parties. They should also promote an atmosphere of tolerance and appreciation of religious diversity, for instance by encouraging inter-religious dialogue as well as by dispelling prejudices which often cause particular harm to members of minorities. Such initiatives could serve the purpose of conflict prevention and have an early-warning function.

Unfortunately, pernicious stereotypes, often amounting to full fledged degradation of religious minorities, continue to be a reality in many States. Moreover, incitement to religious hatred frequently draws on actual or perceived religious differences. International law requires States to prohibit any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Hence States are obliged to take appropriate action. At the same time, it is important that any limitations on freedom of expression deemed necessary to prohibit incitement to religious hatred be defined with the utmost diligence, precision and precaution.

The threshold for any limitations must be very high in order not to have a chilling effect on the exercise of freedom of expression or other human rights. Such precaution is also in the interest of freedom of religion or belief, because a societal atmosphere of openness enhances the chances of dispelling stereotypes and prejudices.

At the same time, freedom of religion or belief does not include the right for one's religion or belief to be free from criticism or all adverse comment. The inter-relatedness of all human rights does not only represent a normative insight; it also has an empirical dimension. Hence promoting freedom of religion or belief is vital for building a holistic system of human rights protection, based on due respect for the inherent dignity of all members of the human family.



Freedom of belief must be a freedom to co-exist

by *Mario Mauro*

Mario Mauro is a member of the European Parliament from Italy, in the Group of the European People's Party, and a member of the Committee of Foreign Affairs

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In these days, like never before, multiculturalism is a word used and abused. It is not possible to build a pluralistic and pacific society by basing it on a compromise, because this will lead to an ideology that can be called “multicultural relativism”.

Religious freedom is the condition through which all the freedoms pass: freedom to express and profess the religion in which we believe is the possibility to escape the abuse of power. This is why we need to insist on the defence of this principle.

Violations of this right are taking place all over the world and affect around 100 million people every year.

All religions are affected by persecution. I am, for example, thinking about the mass murder against Muslims in Srebrenica or the slaughter caused by the Algerian civil war. That is what the nineties handed down to us. In the early XXI century we have to deal with violence caused by those who use the name of God to impose their power on others on the one

hand, and with the discriminations suffered by people submitted to unfair legislations and hate public speeches on the other hand.

Nevertheless, the 75% of deaths linked to religion-based hate crimes affect Christians. This makes this religious group the most persecuted in the world. According to the NGO Open Doors International, in 2010, the top ten list of countries where Christians are persecuted because of their faith numbered states such as North Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mauritania, Laos, and Uzbekistan. But we also have serious persecutions in many other states.

During the last seven years, Iraqi Church has faced a violent attack within a dramatic political condition: fifty-one ch-

urches attacked, hundreds of believers, priests, nuns and also one Archbishop, have been beheaded, hanged, kidnapped and so on. Many of them have also suffered psychological pressures and threats from their persecutors, interested in taking their homes and property.

It often happens that Christian communities, for example in Sudan, co-exist with several different religions, and this is a fact that has distant roots in the history of many different countries.

So, how is it possible to co-exist? In these days, like never before, multiculturalism is a word used and abused. It is not possible to build a pluralistic and pacific society by basing it on a compromise, because this will lead to an ideology that can be called “multicultural relativism”. On the contrary, in this particular historical moment, it is evident that only the encounter between clear cultural and religious identity and between people willing to meet each other can build a society where different people cohabit and cooperate in building a better world.

Consequently, it is necessary to recognize the right of religious freedom in toto. The key point is the permission for everybody to freely live according to their own faith and to freely convert themselves. To live a faith in a visible way can be fundamental for a more peaceful society. Thanks to this, everyone can build a piece of the common good. On the contrary, if we reach a compromise based on wrong principles, we can prepare the base for a disaster that will last for an entire generation.

As I have previously pointed out, there are many types of discrimination, in par-

ticularly where legislation and judgments are used to restrict the ability to express one's belief. It happens frequently in many European states.

At the same time, states like Turkey, where believers suffer both discrimination and persecution, want to become Members States. Here, the little Christian community is caught between the nationalists' secularism and the fundamentalism. Despite the Turkish Constitution providing freedom of religion, Christians and Jewish believers suffer from discrimination in their everyday life: conversion from Islam to another faith, missions or proselytism of non-muslim religious groups can be dangerous. Media and public speeches encourage bad stereotypes and prejudices against non-muslim believers.

During the last five years we have seen several hate motivated attacks and murders against Christians: I would like to recall, just the murder of Father Santoro in 2006, the killing of three members of a protestant church in Malatya in 2007, the raid into a church in Kadikoy in March 2009 and the several criminal damages that happened in some cemeteries.

Europe cannot remain indifferent. The EU must take co-responsibility for the protection of religious freedom all over the world, and of course within the EU region.

It is fundamental to remember what the nature of a believer is: a believer is a free man in constant relation with God. This means he will never be overcome by any political system. This concept is well explained by the great philosopher, Josef Tishner, who said: “God is born, great powers tremble”.



More than senior figures from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim religions as well as from the Sikh and Hindu communities from fourteen EU Members States met in the Berlaymont on July 19 2010 to discuss the importance of combating poverty and social exclusion with a view to European governance.



Pakistan: persecution in the name of Islam

by *Fiorello Provera*

Fiorello Provera is a member of the European Parliament from Italy, a member of the Europe of freedom and democracy Group, and Vice-chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee



Pakistani women protesters wear black shawls and mock nooses to protest against newly proposed controversial Islamic rape law in front of Parliament in Islamabad on Wednesday, 20 September 2006. Hundreds of members of different NGOs staged a protest against the delay in repealing Islamic Hudood Law on rape, Known as the Hudood Ordinance.

Earlier this year the European Parliament passed a resolution highlighting the persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan. For the European Union, and in particular for MEPs, the right to freedom of worship is fundamental, universal and non-negotiable. In Pakistan, however, the free practice of religion - at least for non-Muslims - is difficult, hazardous and rare.

Part of the problem of religious persecution in Pakistan stems from the establishment of the country itself in 1947 and the promulgation of its constitution in 1956. It is officially called the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which, in effect, makes the state indivisible from Islam. Pakistan placed religion at the heart of its *raison d'être* in order to distinguish itself from its rival India, from which it had been separated.

But whereas India has developed into a sophisticated democracy in which people of all religions and none live side by side in relative harmony, Pakistan has gone the opposite way. Indeed, Pakistan's attitude to religious freedom stems also from its attitude to political freedom.

Democracy - at least as we in the EU

understand it - remains elusive in Pakistan. For much of its history Pakistan has been ruled by military dictators, and even during periods of civilian government the army has maintained ultimate power, as regular coups d'état have shown.

Moreover, the military has cynically used Islamisation as a means of controlling the population.

This process gathered pace under General Zia ul-Haq, who imposed draconian and disproportionately harsh laws during the 1970s and 1980s in order to enshrine the dominance of Islam.

The Hudood Ordinance was a law passed in 1979 that replaced civil sentences for various crimes with sharia punishments as mandated by the Koran. One of its consequences was to make it extremely difficult and dangerous for women to prove an allegation of rape. Pakistan's own National Commission on the Status of Women estimated in 2003 that eighty per cent of women in prison had been incarcerated for adultery because they had failed to prove an allegation of rape.

This part of the Hudood Ordinance was repealed in 2006 by a law that made rape a crime prosecutable under civil law.

However, the new law has proved extremely difficult to enforce in a country with such a weak government and conservative society. Islamist groups, which maintain a powerful grip over Pakistani society, have demanded the reintroduction of the Hudood Ordinance calling it God's divine punishment and a victim of unjust propaganda by human rights organisations.

General Zia also introduced a series of laws against blasphemy, under which anyone convicted can be sentenced to death.

The extremely wide definition of blasphemy makes it easy for the Sunni-dominated government to prosecute Christians, Hindus and Baha'i adherents, as well as Shias and Ahmadi Muslims. Ahmadi are considered to be apostates in Pakistan and are therefore subject to a particularly robust campaign of government-sanctioned vilification.

The civilian and military governments that have come after General Zia have done little to combat the rise of fundamentalism and obscurantism.

What are the solutions to the problem of religious persecution in Pakistan? The development of genuine democracy would

contribute substantially to a less repressive religious environment, because religious freedom is a by-product of political freedom.

Wholesale reform of the education system would promote values of tolerance, diversity and respect.

A focus on enhancing the rights of women would undoubtedly help to dilute some of the more extremist elements of Islam in Pakistan.

A serious effort to counteract the terrorists and militants operating freely on Pakistani soil and spreading their poisonous jihadi ideology is long overdue and most welcome. Steps to improve the quality and integrity of governance and in particular to clamp down on the rampant corruption that has crippled Pakistan's economy are absolutely essential.

Ultimately, the European Parliament can criticise, expose and denounce as much as it likes, but it will never change the situation in Pakistan.

Change must come from within Pakistan, and from within Islam. Only then will Pakistan develop a progressive and open society that truly values religious freedom for everyone.



Sudan: a political solution to religious persecution?

by Charles Tannock

Dr. Charles Tannock, MEP, is a British Conservative member of the European Parliament representing London and serves as ECR Group coordinator on the Committee on Foreign Affairs

The battle for religious freedom often goes hand in hand with the struggle for political independence, especially when religion and the state are indivisible. This is the case in Sudan, where for much of the past half-century the Arab Muslim north has waged a merciless civil war against Nilotic southerners, who are African and mainly Christian or animist.

In early 2011 voters in the autonomous region of South Sudan will decide whether to secede from the north and create an independent sovereign state. According to all reliable opinion polling it is almost certain that the south will take this opportunity to control its own destiny. Not surprisingly, leaders of the Christian churches in

South Sudan have urged southerners not to throw away this chance to enshrine their inalienable right to freedom of worship.

Ever since Sudan won independence from Britain in 1956, southerners have been treated like second-class citizens in their own country. The south is characterized by abject poverty and a serious lack of public investment in even the most basic infrastructure. As well as starving the south of its fair share of tax revenues, Khartoum has constantly sought to impose Islamist values and sharia law on the south.

Civil war broke out immediately after independence and lasted seventeen years.

A decade of uneasy peace followed until the government in Khartoum tried to tear up the Addis Ababa agreement, which had ended the civil war. This agreement had granted the south considerable autonomy and had also recognized the very different religious heritage and practices in the south. Conflict broke out again and lasted for 22 years.

The renewed civil war caused the deaths of at least two million people, and caused many millions more to flee their homes. South Sudan remains littered with landmines. Only now are children in South Sudan going to school instead of learning how to shoot guns. The civil war has left the south one of the least developed and neediest places on the planet.

The civil war finally came to an

end in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. South Sudan gained a substantial degree of autonomy and in the past five years has made some progress towards rebuilding its infrastructure and society. The churches and NGOs that played such a courageous role during the civil war by providing moral and material assistance to the south are now in the business of saving souls and not just saving lives.

When analysing the cause of Sudan's horrifying history in recent decades, it would be easy to blame colonialism for creating the conditions in which religious tension developed into war.

Undoubtedly the colonial authorities were deluding themselves if they expected religious harmony to take root in Sudan, such a massive and diverse country, when it gained independence. But other countries in the region, such as Kenya and Uganda, have shown that they can develop societies in which different religions can flourish.

Why did this not happen in Sudan? Primarily because the leaders of Sudan in Khartoum have always been wedded to a rigid Islamist vision of their country's development, in which every aspect of state and private life is subject to and regulated by Islamic law. There are several examples of successful Muslim-majority countries that have not sought to impose Islam on religious minorities – Tunisia, Senegal, Bangladesh and Indonesia

are all countries where secular governance and greater religious freedom have contributed substantially to the development of progressive, forward-looking societies.

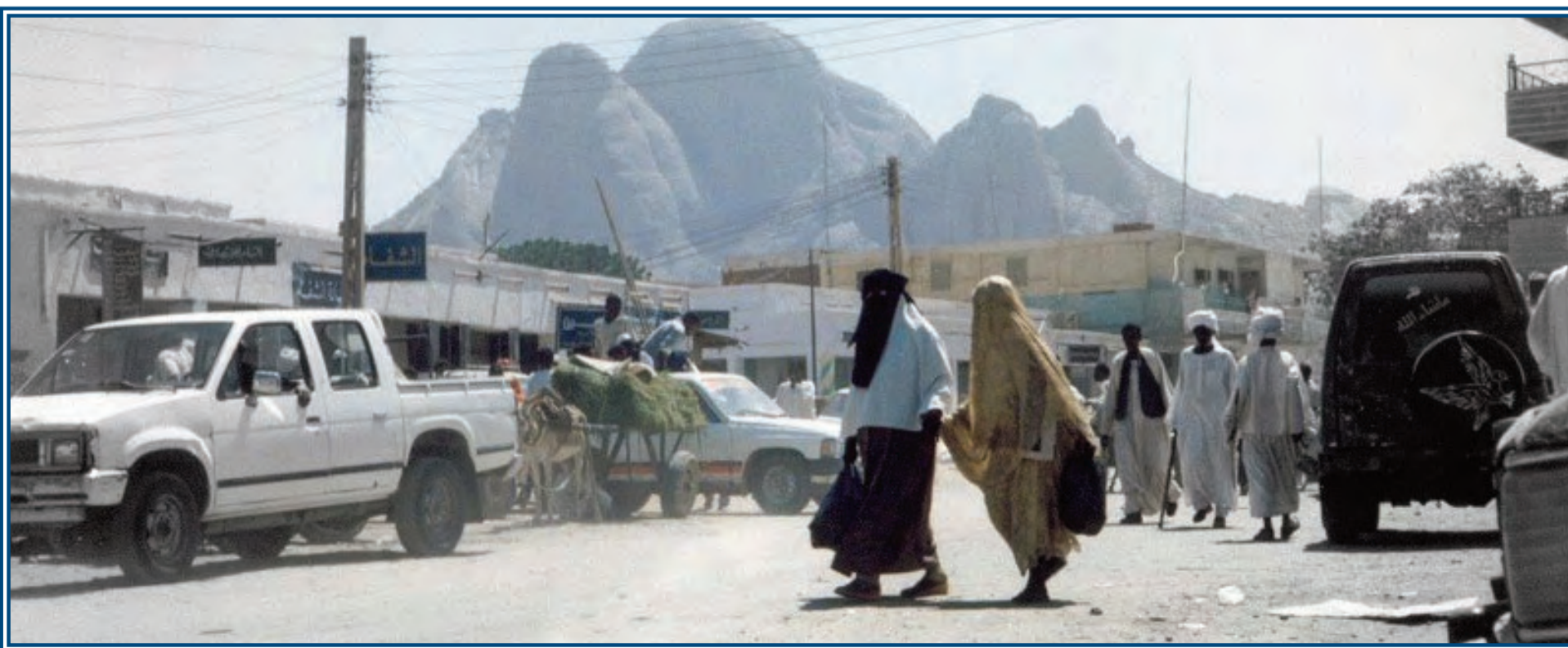
In Sudan's case, however, a strain of radical Islam based on jihad took root in Khartoum in the mid-1950s and we are still living with the consequences today, not least in the strife-torn region of Darfur. Sudan's case has interesting parallels with Nigeria, which is divided on religious lines between the Muslim north (where sharia law applies) and the Christian south. Occasionally this tension spills over into violence in which hundreds of people are murdered. The expected partition of Sudan will undoubtedly refocus attention on Nigeria and the sustainability of its future as a unitary state.

Often in cases of religious persecution there is no obvious or achievable solution to the problem. However, in Sudan the solution is obvious (at least to most southerners) and it is also achievable. The referendum on secession offers South Sudan a new perspective on the future – a future in which southerners will no longer face persecution, marginalization and violence because of their religious beliefs.

The American poet Robert Frost once said "Good fences make good neighbours." This is as true for warring ethnic communities in Sudan as it is for the squabbling farmers Frost was referring to.



Often in cases of religious persecution there is no obvious or achievable solution to the problem. However, in Sudan the solution is obvious (at least to most southerners) and it is also achievable.





Persecution against Christians remains unnoticed

by *Konrad Szymański*

Konrad Szymański is a member of the European Parliament from Poland, in the European Conservatives and Reformists Group

It is without doubt that the freedom of religion constitutes a pillar of human rights. It has been stated in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Art. 9.1) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 18). The practice shows however that the persecution on the grounds of religion or belief is still present worldwide. According to the statistics at least 75% of religious persecution is directed against people of Christian faith and each year about 170,000 Christians suffer because of their beliefs. The total number of faithful who are discriminated amounts already to 100 million. It's also a known fact that more Christians have been martyred in the 20th century than in all the prior 1,900 years. All in all it makes Christians the most persecuted religious group.

Persecution may include also obstacles to the proclamation of faith, confiscation and destruction of places of worship or prohibition of religious training and education.

Restrictions on religion touch over half of the countries and these contain more than 80% of the global population. Interestingly the problem is present worldwide, irrespective of the country, its cultural background or political regime. Naturally the democratic regimes shall have fewer tendencies for violations of religious freedom. Christians suffer because of radical Islam, sometimes Hinduism or atheistic communism.

Of course, the situation differs from country to country. First of all we have to distinguish between the state hostility towards religious minorities and social aversion, which the governments simply do not know how to handle.

During the conference which I have recently organised together with Mr Mario Mauro MEP on this topic, we have listened to the witnesses of persecution representing various cultures and backgrounds. They have given very concrete examples of the tragic situation in their respective countries.

Our guest from Iraq, Mgr Louis Sako, has presented the situation of Christians there, in

a country with an Islamic majority. He expressed great concern about the future existence of Christian minority in Iraq as its number continues to diminish. It is due to the different forms of discrimination against this minority. There have been alarming numbers of religiously motivated killings, beatings, rapes, forced conversions, marriages, and displacement from homes and businesses. At the same time, being Iraqi himself he underlined a strong belief in the diplomatic means to bring back the freedom of religion in his country. There is an urgent need for fostering reconciliation among Iraqis, for promotion of human rights in that area and asking the governments to respect the rules.

Another guest, Mr Kok Ksor has spoken on the behalf of the Montagnard people living in Vietnam. This Christian community endures strong pressures and infringements of their rights from the Vietnamese communist government. The pictures he described were horrifying, but again these people do not want to resort to other than peaceful means.

They do not want to leave their country either. Up to the present time though, the Vietnamese government have continued to attack their villages, arrested, tortured or sent them to prisons. There is an open fight of the communist party with the Christian belief. Still there is hope that the international community can exercise its influence to improve the situation in Vietnam.

A situation of the Christian minority is nearly the same difficult in India, the largest world democracy, where Christians constitute only 2.34% of the population, as Dr T.M. Joseph has presented at our conference. Unfortunately Christians have become a target of the dominant community, especially in the province inhabited by their majority, Orissa. There have been many radical incidents of physical violence noted in the last years.

As a fruit of the mentioned conference, a written declaration on religious freedom is signed by the members of all four biggest Parliamentary political groups and hopefully

adopted soon by the majority of the House. Among others this declaration "calls on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to incorporate the subject of religious freedom into European external policies".

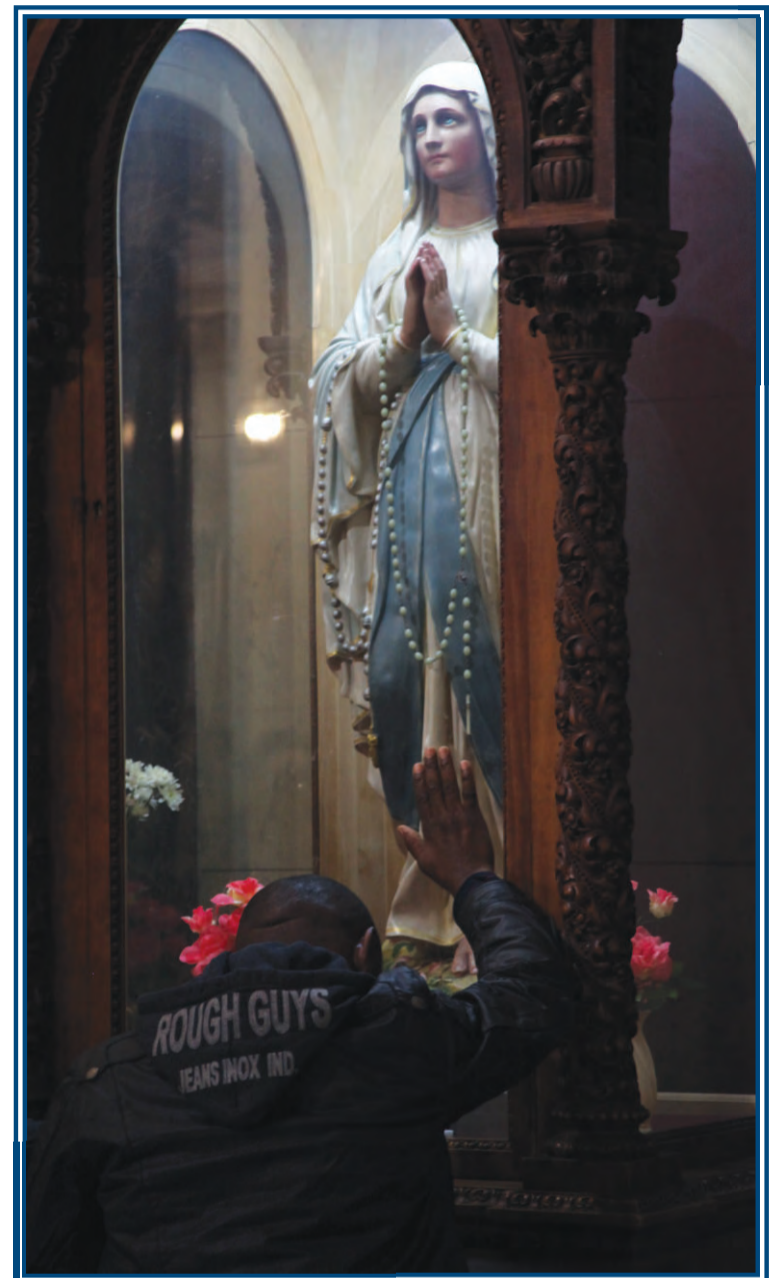
Is it enough however how the EU tackles the co-responsibility for the protection of religious freedom in the world? Taking into account all the possible political and financial instruments that the EU institutions have in their possession, we must admit that the EU lips are still sealed.

Human rights always find their expression in a practical dimension. Religious freedom, defence from the persecutions, especially against Christians, is not a result of any political preference. It is a demand of the moment coming from a situational analysis in concrete political circumstances.

The European Union possesses many instruments to improve the situation of the persecuted Christians or other religious minorities in the world. First of all, the emerging EU diplomacy shall react on every incident of intolerance on that ground. Secondly, all of the countries, which practice the politics of religious oppression, or which do not successfully oppose the persecutions, develop political and economic relations with the EU. Vietnam, Iraq or India shall become more and more important partners for the Union. This partnership however should be conditioned upon the guarantees of respect for the rights of the religious minorities, especially of the persecuted, in many different ways, Christians.

Many countries such as Algeria or Russia are our partners in the Neighbourhood policy. This could be used as another instrument of influence.

European silence on the problems of religious freedom undermines our credibility in the area of human rights in the world. We have a clear obligation in this field and nothing can excuse us from a reaction to the mass martyrdom of Christians, which we witness in XX and XXI centuries.



Alexandros Michailidis | www.alemi.gr



Is it enough however how the EU tackles the co-responsibility for the protection of religious freedom in the world? Taking into account all the possible political and financial instruments that the EU institutions have in their possession, we must admit that the EU lips are still sealed.



The need for a secular voice in the European Union

by *Sophia in 't Veld*

Sophia in 't Veld is a member of the European Parliament from the Netherlands, in the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe. She is a member of the EU-Turkey JPC and vice-chair of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs



In past centuries, worldly and ecclesiastical powers were closely linked, and worldly rules sought divine legitimation of their reign. Despite the official separation of church and state, in many Member States we still find traces of this century long cooperation.

After decades of ongoing secularisation, and despite declining church attendance, churches and religious groups are increasing their influence on EU policy making. The first half century of European integration was dedicated largely to policies of a more technical nature: coal and steel or the internal market. As Europe evolves from diplomatic cooperation between governments, into a political union, a community of citizens, the need arises to define the shared values and discuss ethical questions.

Our values have already been laid down formally in a wide range of treaties, conventions and laws. The EU Treaties refer to shared values and to fundamental rights. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the European Convention on

Human Rights and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights provide a solid basis for the protection and promotion of our values.

Civil society actively naturally engages in further defining the values of the European Union, including associations representing various religious and secularist life stances. This resulted in the inclusion of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, stating that the EU “shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations”. But in practice, the “Dialogue” is very uneven and unrepresentative, as religious forces, in particular the most conservative strand, have disproportionate influence on EU policy making. The secularist voice is ba-

rely heard in the debate.

Most of these organisations have representatives in Brussels. However, unlike business lobbies or NGOs, these organisations are not subject to the regular rules on transparency. This is a serious omission, as this means the political influence of these organisations cannot be verified. All the more serious as religious organisations do not only have the regular advocacy tools of a lobby, but they can also apply the official rules and sanctions of their religious community – for example excommunication – to policy makers, forcing them to vote according to religious doctrine.

The Roman Catholic church has a special position, as the Vatican is at the same time a state. The EU has diplomatic relations with the Vatican, including an EU embassy. In past centuries, worldly and ecclesiastical powers were closely linked, and worldly rules sought divine legitimation of their reign. Despite the official separation of church and state, in many Member States we still find traces of this century long cooperation. In contrast, the EU institutions have been purely secular from their inception. Attempts to insert a reference to the Judaeo-Christian roots in the EU Treaty failed. But the leaders of the EU institutions are seeking to create special ties between the EU and religion. Within the office of EU Commission President Barroso, a special unit has been set up for the “Relations with religion, churches and communities of conviction”. Barroso stages annual “Summits” with religious leaders. The selection criteria for participants are unclear, as is the

procedure for deciding the agenda. In recent years the Presidents of the Parliament and the Council have joined these “Summits”. Although there is no particular basis for this in Article 17, Barroso has chosen to meet separately with religious and secular groups. Barroso only accepted to meet with secular groups after questions and pressure from Members of the European Parliament.

A similar attitude was found in the previous President of the European Parliament, who had invited a series of religious leaders to address the Plenary session of the European Parliament. Under pressure he agreed to add a secular speaker to the list (the only woman, incidentally), but the President of Parliament himself was ostentatiously absent during her address to the plenary assembly.

The debates focus almost exclusively on a limited number of issues, relating to Fundamental Rights, sexual and reproductive health rights, family, and marriage. Freedom of religion and freedom of speech are another area of interest. Religious lobbies have no strong interest in other policy areas, such as transports or competition policies. On the whole the most powerful religious lobbies represent very conservative views, sometimes even at odds with the EU Fundamental Rights, for example equal treatment of gay and lesbian citizens. They make their presence felt on dossiers like the Anti-Discrimination directives, sexual and reproductive health rights in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, Development cooperation, the fight against HIV/Aids, or EU funding for stem cell research. In many cases they claim exemptions and exceptions from EU Fundamental Rights, on grounds of freedom of religion.

The European version of the “Religious Right” does not represent the majority of European citizens. But they have a strong influence on policy making. As Europe is becoming a mature political union, it is high time the secular voice be heard. Secular movements are highly diverse: atheists, agnostics, secularists, humanists, but also liberal religious associations such as Catholics for a Free Choice, women’s rights and gay rights movements. But they share the view that the separation of church and state applies equally to the EU institutions, and they stand firm for EU Fundamental Rights.

In the European Parliament the Platform for Secularism in Politics brings together MEPs and NGOs. The debates cover a wide range of issues, from gay rights to conscientious objection in medicine, from apostasy within Islam to the role of Concordats. The affiliated NGOs are now setting up the Alliance for Secularism in Europe. The Platform and the Alliance will work towards a strong voice for secularism the European Union.





Human rights: the basis of harmony

by Nicolas Berger

Nicolas Berger is the Director of Amnesty International's European Institutions Office in Brussels



Spyros Paloukis | www.spyrospaloukis.com

There is often considerable overlap between different grounds of discrimination. This is particularly evident in respect of discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin and religion. Indeed, telling the two apart can sometimes be quite difficult. Discriminators are not always that discerning; they tend rather to lump all 'otherness' together and discriminate accordingly.

Two groups which frequently suffer discrimination on account of a variety of overlapping prejudices are Jews and Muslims. These two groups may be discriminated against not only on the grounds of their ethnic origins and often misunderstood or presumed religious beliefs, but also because of their presumed political beliefs and responsibility for world events. Thus, European Jews are subject to abuse and even violence on account of a perceived responsibility for the situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories, while European Muslims are often indiscriminately associated with extremist views and violent ideologies.

Discrimination on these overlapping grounds takes various forms including violent attacks, interference with the freedom of religion and expression and the denial of equal access to employment, goods and services.

Anti-Semitism has a long and painful history in Europe. Even if the public expression of anti-Semitic sentiment is less common today than it once was, it still enjoys widespread popular currency and it unfortunately not always countered with

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Even long-standing Muslim communities face difficulties in exercising their rights to freely practice their religion with the construction of mosques often being prevented by strong local resistance and existing places of worship occasionally, but increasingly being subject to vandalism and arson attacks.

the force it should be. As a result, individual acts of anti-Semitism, including violent attacks on Jewish people and the desecration of places of worship and burial, still occur with disturbing frequency across Europe.

Islamophobia in Europe is, in its current guise, a more recent phenomenon coinciding with the large-scale arrival of Muslim immigrants in most western European countries over the last 50 years. This short period has been sufficient, however, for Islamophobia to penetrate deep into the mainstream of public discourse and political debate.

Even if it is often difficult to distinguish from a broader xenophobia, it is

clear that Islamophobia exists as a distinct and deeply troubling phenomenon that has been significantly exacerbated by the reaction to the 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA. The result has been a variety of human rights violations.

The rising tide of Islamophobia has resulted in increased discrimination against Muslims and individuals presumed to be Muslims in all areas of life. Even long-standing Muslim communities face difficulties in exercising their rights to freely practice their religion with the construction of mosques often being prevented by strong local resistance and existing places of worship occasionally, but increasingly being subject to vandalism

and arson attacks. Discrimination against Muslims in the area of employment, particularly of women wearing religious clothing, is widespread across Europe. Indeed, the right to wear religious dress is itself being increasingly contested.

Europe's Muslims have also been both specifically targeted and disproportionately affected by a range of security measures which, ostensibly designed to counter the threat of terrorism, have often resulted in serious human rights violations. Ethnic profiling has resulted in Muslims being disproportionately stopped, searched and arrested, with negligible results in terms of successful prosecutions.

Under hastily introduced counter-terrorism laws, Muslims suspected of often only the most oblique involvement in terrorism-related activities, have faced prolonged preventive detention, the denial of due process and removal to countries where they face a real risk of being subjected to torture or other ill-treatment. In addition to the violations of the rights of individuals, such measures have fed popular prejudices and contributed further to the alienation of Europe's Muslim communities. It is clear that the human rights framework cannot provide all the answers to the many challenges posed by Europe's rich diversity.

It does, however, provide a minimum set of rights and obligations, which, if better respected, would contribute greatly to the harmonious flourishing of Europe's many different peoples, traditions, cultures, languages and religions.



Flickr | Center for American Progress

English Defence League supporters and anti-fascist supporters clash in Birmingham city centre.



Muslims living in fear

by Greg Austin

Dr. Greg Austin is Vice President at the EastWest Institute and Director of EWT's Global Security Program and Policy Innovation. He has also held senior posts at the International Crisis Group and the Foreign Policy Centre London

“I am not a fascist, a nazi, a terrorist, a criminal or violent. But I am constantly being forced on the defensive”. This is one piece of the evidence of a Muslim student to a Dutch court hearing race-hate charges against Geert Wilders, a member of parliament in October this year. According to Wilders: “Islam is not a religion, it's an ideology, the ideology of a retarded culture. I have a problem with Islamic tradition, culture, ideology.” In another place he says: “The Koran is a fascist book which incites violence.” He called for it to be banned, like Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*.

The current Netherlands government, currently a minority government, has come to office by relying on the support of Wilders' party. This was a sad day for democracy and for the Netherlands.

Switch to the United States and Newt Gingrich, former Republican speaker of the House of Representatives. He called Muslim organizers of a planned religious centre near Ground Zero in New York “radical Islamists” interested in “supremacy” and likened them to Nazis wanting to put up a sign beside the Holocaust memorial or Japanese wanting to put up a sign at Pearl Harbor.

New York's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, countered Gingrich by saying it would be a “sad day for America” if opponents of the

planned religious centre got their way. President Obama also backed the right of the organizers of the centre to go ahead with their plans.

Islamophobia is now at the centre of national politics in a number of liberal democratic countries. It has surfaced strongly in international politics. The Organization of Islamic Conference, an international grouping of 57 countries, has initiated a global campaign against Islamophobia. Al Qaeda has taken note of the rising hostility to Muslims and threatened retaliation for it. There is an escalating climate of fear and hate around this religion in too many places.

What is Islamophobia? According to the Runnymede Trust, it has many faces that include the following. Islam is seen “as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change”. It is seen as inferior to the West, barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist, violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a ‘clash of civilizations’. It is seen as a political ideology. The Trust also noted that hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims.

Runnymede, a name taken by the Trust mentioned above, is the place in Britain where the Magna Carta was signed, the document seen as one of the principal sources of political and civil rights enjoyed

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Al Qaeda has taken note of the rising hostility to Muslims and threatened retaliation for it. There is an escalating climate of fear and hate around this religion in too many places.

across Europe today. Ironically, the document was bound by its time. The first provision in it does not grant religious freedom but grants freedom to organized religion, the “Church”. That tells us something. Religion has always been highly politicized and remains so. In fact, religious freedom (freedom of conscience) is arguably one of the last freedoms to arrive, is often the most politically contested and the most fragile. One reason is that because a religion offers potentially decisive views on what is right and wrong, all sorts of demagogues see it as very fertile ground

for sowing the seeds of division and hate to produce a false flower of legitimacy for their own political goals.

The revolutions of Europe and the United States over two centuries ago were supposed to have forced the separation of state and religion, and to have guaranteed freedom of conscience. All citizens might therefore reasonably expect governments in liberal pluralist democracies (and their parliamentarians) not to implement policy or act in any way to appease religious hate or an irrational discomfort with Islam. Oppose Islamophobia, now.



Religious freedom and extremism

by *George Readings*

George Readings is a Research Fellow and Communications Officer for Quilliam, the world's first counter-extremism think tank



Students of City University's Islamic society conduct outdoor prayers in On 2 February 2010, supporting that they were 'forced' to conduct their prayers outside although they were adamant that this was 'by no means a demonstration... [r]ather it is an obligation'.

During the 2009/2010 academic year, a small clique of extremists was able to take over the Islamic Society at City University, London. From this position, they preached that people who choose to leave Islam should be killed, declared Shi'a Muslims not to be Muslims and left Jewish students so intimidated that, rather than praying in the 'interfaith' prayer room, they felt safer using empty class rooms and lecture halls instead. They even taught that other Sunni Muslim students, if they chose not to pray five times a day, should be killed as "apostates".

When they were challenged, this group – who had trampled over the religious freedom of students they disagreed with – complained that "Islamophobes" were denying them their right to religious freedom. This has all been documented by my colleague, Lucy James, in a ground-breaking briefing published recently by Quilliam about radicalisation of students at City University.

Elsewhere in London, as reported recently in the British press, preachers linked to Khatme Nubawwat Academy, a British offshoot of a Pakistani group, also exercised their "religious freedom". They did so by teaching that Ahmadis are not Muslims and warning that any attempt to change laws in Pakistan forbidding Ahmadis from describing themselves as Muslims

would be met with violence on a similar scale to a 1953 massacre of Ahmadis in Lahore.

"Religious freedom" is the legal right to believe, not believe, or change one's mind about believing, in whatever god or gods one chooses, but what meaning does it really have if extremists can exploit it to justify attacks on the religious freedom of others? And should "religious freedom" really be a carte blanche for religious believers to act however they like, so long as they can argue that it is "part of their religion"?

The answers to these questions may, at times, seem obvious. For example, nobody would argue that "religious freedom" allows a group to engage in terrorist violence. At the other end of the spectrum, however, does "religious freedom" allow a parent to withdraw their child from sex education classes in school? Or to force them to wear a kippah, kara, headscarf, or even face-veil?

In the two cases above, the groups involved clearly held no brief for the concept of "religious freedom". Indeed, they hoped to deny it to people whose views were not compatible with their own. Moreover, their intimidatory behaviour may have had immediate and practical consequences on the ability of others to exercise their religious freedom. Should such behaviour really pass without comment in the name of "religious freedom", as the extremists themselves

argue? "Religious freedom" is a vital principle because it allows a diverse and pluralistic society to survive. But so do other principles, like the rule of law, equality, democracy, and freedom of speech. As such, "religious freedom" cannot be allowed to undermine these other principles. For example, "religious freedom" allows an individual to believe that Ahmadis are not Muslim, but it doesn't exempt this viewpoint from criticism. And it certainly doesn't allow a bending of the law to permit inciting hatred, or even violence, against Ahmadis.

Inevitably, discussion of what is and what is not legitimate "religious freedom" will carry on as long as there are multi-religious societies, and different understandings of what it means will be reached in different countries and at times. At present, for example, the French 'burka ban' is unthinkable in Britain, but this may not always be the case.

Equally inevitable is the fact that extremists like Khatme Nubawwat Academy and the clique at City University will continue to exist, and will continue to be interested in "religious freedom" only so far as it provides a way to discourage and discredit their critics. This means that, whilst religious freedom is key to allowing pluralistic and diverse societies to survive, so is challenging extremists who exploit this important right to deny it to others.



Full veil, burqa, niqab, hijab... a challenge to 'European' values?

by Willy Fautré

Willy Fautré is the director of Human Rights Without Frontiers (Brussels) and Member of the International Consortium on Law and Religion Studies (ICLRS)



ANA/PANAQEB AHMED

A file picture dated 08 June 2010 shows Burqa clad Afghan women.

The recent adoption of a law banning the burqa (1) in the public square in France is posing the problem of the intersectionality of religious freedom, cultural rights and women's rights, one of the most complex human rights issues in today's global world.

The religious, sacred and cultural are sometimes so intimately interwoven that it is difficult to differentiate between them. Societies dominated by men and by the rule of religion have adopted a number of practices which are not explicitly prescribed by their holy books, such as the preservation of girls' virginity by genital mutilation, or the eradication of sinful sexual relations by honor killings. Clothing restrictions and obligations imposed by states or by religious groups (but also freely chosen by women), whether they are rooted in religious principles or not, are debated publicly, not only in Muslim countries but also in European, American and Asian countries where Islam is a minority religion.

Situation in some Muslim countries

In Egypt, the Ministry of Health has prohibited the wearing of the niqab (2) by nurses in hospitals. In

Iraq, the niqab was banned by a fatwa. In Kuwait, women wearing the niqab have been banned from driving for security reasons. In Saudi Arabia, people in charge of public security have started a battle against the niqab after discovering that many Islamic terrorists have used it to hide in and commit terror attacks. In Syria, students and teachers are not allowed to wear the full Islamic veil.

Legislation and practice in some EU countries

With regard to the EU member states, a wide variety of policies range from the ban, to the accommodation in the public sphere, in schools and in state institutions. No legislative provision explicitly deals with the wearing of the burqa in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden.

In other countries, there is no legislative provision either but local institutional initiatives have been taken to ban it indirectly.

In Italy, several municipal councils have adopted decrees banning the burqa on the controversial basis of two laws on public security.

In the Netherlands, there is no general rule banning the full veil in educational institutions but some schools have adopted regulations banning the burqa and their decisions have been endorsed by the Commission on Equal Treatment. In Spain, a handful of towns and cities have banned the wearing of burqas and niqabs in municipal buildings, including in the country's second-largest city of Barcelona in June.

In UK, the Ministry of Education released a circular letter about school uniforms in October 2007, which allowed the school councils to have an interior regulation and to ban the burqa on the grounds of security or of the nature and quality of the classes.

On the basis of a decree released on 22 March 2006 in the *Begum* case, the House of Lords considered that the school had not violated the right to manifest one's religion or beliefs when excluding a female student who wanted to attend classes with a jilbab (a long dress worn with a hood or a veil). In Belgium's lower house of parliament almost unanimously decided on 29 April 2010 to ban burqa-type Islamic dress in public but the draft law still needs to be approved by the Senate and political life has been paralyzed by a

political stalemate since the parliamentary elections in June.

By now, the wearing of the full veil in public is prohibited in an increasing number of municipalities, especially in Flanders. These bans are accompanied by administrative fines which can amount to 250 €. In 2009, the city of Brussels fined only 29 women - down from 33 in 2008 - for wearing a burqa-type dress.

Up to now, France is the only EU member to have adopted a national law banning the burqa in the public square. The legislation was overwhelmingly approved by the lower house of parliament in July. In September, the law was passed at the Senate by a vote of 246 to one, with about 100 abstentions coming essentially from left-leaning politicians.

Society attitudes throughout the EU

In Austria, a debate was initiated by Social Democrat Minister for Women and Public Services, Gabriele Heinisch-Hoseck, towards formulating laws that would ban the full veil in public spaces if the number of women wearing it were to increase dramatically.

In Denmark, the majority of Danes are opposed to the wearing of a full veil by Muslim women in the streets. Moreover, the penalty for forcing a woman to wear the burqa has recently been increased to four years imprisonment.

In Germany, a survey conducted in April-May 2010 found that the German public strongly supports a ban on the full veil: 71% approve while just 28% disapprove.

In Italy, 63 % of the Italians are in favor of a ban.

In the Netherlands, only about 150 women are said to wear the head-to-toe burqa or the niqab and people think a general ban would heighten alienation among the country's Muslims, who number approximately 1 million.

In Spain, a survey conducted in April-May 2010 found that the public strongly supports a ban on the full veil: 59% approve while just 37 % disapprove.

In Sweden, according to a census made by Expressen (independently liberal) and the Swedish research consultancy Demoskop, 53 % of the Swedish population want a law against wearing burqa and niqab in public, while 46 % are said to be against a prohibition.

In France, a survey conducted in April-May 2010 found that the

French public overwhelmingly endorses the government's ban: 82% approve of a ban on Muslim women wearing full veils in public, including schools, hospital and government offices, while just 17% disapprove.

Ban on the full veil: pros and cons

Three categories of arguments are mainly used by the supporters of a full or partial ban on the full veil: security, women's rights and integration in the European values system.

Security: Some states have banned or want to ban the full veil on the grounds of public safety and argue that the police need to see the faces of everybody on the streets in order to prevent criminal activities (i.e. hold ups) and suicide-bombings, to identify criminals or prisoners on the run, to find missing persons, and so on.

For security reasons, the veil and the full veil may also need to be banned at the workplace.

Women's rights: Westerners, non-Muslims, and many Muslim women are actively fighting what they consider the subjugation and subordination of women through the imposition of the full veil. However, a ban could further worsen the plight of those who are coerced by family or by the dictates of tradition to cover themselves in public. Many believe that by making the burqa and the niqab illegal, a lot of women would be forced to stay at home, which would further alienate them and deprive them of their freedom of movement, their right to education, their access to public and health services, economic opportunities and their ability to seek advice or support.

European/ French values: One of the most pervasive underlying assumptions in the discourse on European Muslim integration is that Muslim religiosity is incompatible with and a threat to European values. In France, president Sarkozy held that wearing a full veil is incompatible with France's republican values. With such argument, the French government, it will give strong arguments to such hardliners as Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who will be too happy to defend the Iran's republican values and impose a strict dress code to all women, including to European female tourists. Is that what the supporters of the defence of national or European values and identity really want?



Assyrian Christians face destruction in Iraq

by *Andy Darmoo*

Andy Darmoo is a member of the Save the Assyrians Campaign



It is estimated that since the invasion about half of all Christians have left their homes. Some have fled to the north or have escaped to countries like Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, while others have eventually reached Europe.



Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrian of Iraq protest in front of the European Union headquarters in Brussels.

New Europe has asked me to write an article for this supplement focusing on religious freedom, particularly regarding the situation being faced by the Assyrian Christians of Iraq. Since 2003, members of this ancient community have been increasingly forced to abandon their homes, sometimes literary with nothing except a bag of clothes, and catch the nearest bus to take them to the borders of Jordan, and nowadays Syria. These two countries, which are not wealthy countries, have thankfully opened their doors to millions of refugees, due to the carnage in Iraq – whether due to abductions, rape or murder, which are continuing to take place daily. This is especially highlighted in October's attack on a church in Baghdad, when many of the congregation were held hostage for hours and then killed by terrorists, who may have been from Egypt, Yemen or neighbouring countries.

While a British citizen for forty years, I was born in Iraq and am myself an Assyrian Christian. Assyrians are the indigenous people of Iraq and were the first to embrace Christianity as their national religion in the first century AD. It is well known that Assyrians speak Aramaic, the language believed to be spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ; we pride ourselves to be the first people to embrace Christianity.

Over the years of sanctions I had tra-

velled to Iraq to help provide much-needed humanitarian and medical aid, so I was aware of conditions facing Assyrians in the country at the time, particularly in Baghdad. Sanctions certainly took their toll, but providing Assyrians steered clear of politics they were largely left alone by the regime.

However, following the war in 2003 catastrophe struck. It is unbelievable that even under the previous regime Assyrians did not face the type of insecurity faced now, even after seven years. It is estimated that since the invasion about half of all Christians have left their homes. Some have fled to the north or have escaped to countries like Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, while others have eventually reached Europe. These people are living in these countries as refugees and need support with basic needs such as housing and medication.

The situation for Assyrian Christians has grown steadily worse over the years in the seven years since the invasion. Baghdad and Mosul are still dangerous places for Christians, with numerous examples of horrendous anti-Christian atrocities including kidnapping and murder. Of course, churches have been targeted and Assyrians are finding it extremely difficult to care for the vulnerable and needy in the community.

After the invasion, with a British journalist friend, I started a campaign called

Save the Assyrians. The intention was to put pressure on the West to use its power to ensure the Iraqi Government guaranteed the rights of its Assyrian and Christian community.

Sadly, these efforts have fallen on deaf ears. There have been meetings in Washington, in New York at the UN, with the European Commission, but nothing has resulted from any of these. Even as recently as July this year, I was invited to a meeting of the various Christian denominations in Iraq (as I had dealt with some of the delegates previously), and attended on behalf of the Save the Assyrians campaign. Unfortunately, I can report that nothing progressed – we had good listeners from the US State Department and Congress but that is all.

More concrete steps have needed to be taken against successive Iraqi Governments to force them to meet their obligations to its own people, particularly those who represent such an integral part of the country's rich heritage.

We have tried working through the European Parliament to raise awareness of the situation being faced.

A resolution was passed in the European parliament thanks to Dr Charles Tannock MEP and Glyn Ford, a former MEP, together with many other honourable members. But unfortunately because of the continuing problems with Iraq, such as corruption and the warring fac-

tions running the country, nothing has been done. Since this resolution was passed, there has been no improvement in the situation – in fact, it has only gotten worse, not helped by there still not being a government in place so long after Iraq's last elections.

Since the scale of the exodus of Assyrians from Iraq has become clear, we have also sought funds to provide humanitarian aid for those now living in terrible conditions, whether in Syria or those internally displaced to the north of the country. Unfortunately, the EU has been very slow in providing any assistance to non-Muslim communities in Iraq. Instead, we have been kindly helped by various British and American charities, who not only provide basic help with food and medication, but are also trying to rebuild communities which are in exile.

I hope this article has given you an appreciation of what is being faced by Iraq's Assyrian Christians. You can help us in our efforts by writing to both your local member of parliament and your MEP to put pressure on your government and the EU to use whatever influence it has to help this community.

We cannot continue to allow one of civilisation's oldest communities to simply drain away from its ancestral homeland and disappear, especially as we in Europe are supposed to place a high regard for other people's human rights.



The new frontiers

by *Francisco Jaime Quesado*

Francisco Jaime Quesado is the General Manager of the Innovation and Knowledge Society in Portugal



Flickr - Kevin Krejci

The world is rethinking its frontiers. When Jurgen Habermas spoke about this special global capacity of creating a new commitment between the citizens toward the challenge of the future, he was in fact speaking about this commitment with New Frontiers in a global and complex world. Based in new standards of Law and Democracy, these New Frontiers are above all the confirmation that in this new world the individual performance in a complex society is possible, desirable and above all necessary for the future.

These New Frontiers allow people to know who they are and have a strong commitment with the values of freedom, social justice and development. This is the reason to believe that a new standard of Democracy, more than a possibility, is an individual and collective necessity for all of us, effective global citizens.

Habermas is more than ever present – the difference of this new world will be in the exercise of the capacity of the individual participation as the central contribution to the reinvention of the collective society. In times of Change and Uncertainty, the World must regain its Strategic Competitive Advantage but at the same time must be able to reinforce its Social Dimension.

In this way it's essential to learn the lessons that more than ever emerge from a world that is trying to rebuild its competitive advantage and to reinvent its effective place in a complex and global network of relations.

In the New Global Economy and Innovation Society, people and companies have a central role to play towards a new attitude connected with the creation of value and focus on creativity.

In a time of change, the world can't wait. The world must confirm itself as an "enabler actor" in a very demanding world, introducing in the society and in the economy a capital of trust and innovation that is essential to ensure a central leadership in the future relations between the different social and economic players. These new actors should be more and more global, capable of driving to the social matrix a unique dynamic of knowledge building and selling it as a mobile asset on the global market.

This New Contract of trust between the different actors must be supported by some strategic proposals that demand for a new operational agenda. The world must know how to integrate in a positive way most of the citizens that want to develop new ideas. Social cohesion is done with the constructive participation of the citizens and it is more and more necessary an effective attitude of mobilization for this effort.

A positive integrative policy is a signal that the different actors have a common road to follow in the future.

At the same time, Innovation and Technology must be the "enablers" for competitiveness in this New World. Universities and Companies must perform a new strategic partnership centered in the objectives of the added value, crea-

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Habermas is more than ever present – the difference of this new world will be in the exercise of the capacity of the individual participation as the central contribution to the reinvention of the collective society.

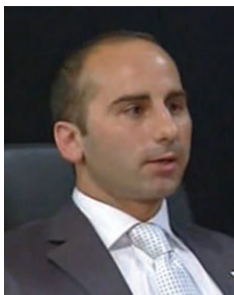
tivity and knowledge. This is the basis for a future effective implementation of a Competitive Strategy, which must be followed by every citizen. The global world has still a strong opportunity to implement an agenda of innovation – the opportunity is more and more know and it can't be lost.

The world is facing a new strategic challenge. Reinventing this world and giving the different Actors (States, Universities, Enterprises, Civil Society) the opportunity of developing new challenges focused on innovation and creativity is in a large sense giving a central contribution to a New Global Order.

The Reinvention of the world is the

reinvention of its people and institutions. An active commitment, in which the focus in the participation and development of new competences, on a collaborative basis, must be the key of the difference.

This is a process that is not determined by law. It is effectively constructed by all the actors in a free and collaborative strategic interaction. The Reinvention of the world is the reinvention of its people and institutions. An active commitment, in which the focus in the participation and development of new competences, on a collaborative basis, must be the key of the difference. This is purpose of the New frontiers.



The Sincerity of Turkey's Democracy?

The Case of the Indigenous Aramean (Syriac) People

by Johnny Messo

Johnny Messo is President of the Syriac Universal Alliance



Syriac-Orthodox St. Akhsnoyo church at Midyat, Turkey

From the outside, today's Turkey appears as if it differs markedly from yesterday's Turkey. However, one should always bear in mind that not everything that shines is gold. As a result of the decision made in December 2004 by the European Union (EU) to start the accession negotiations with Turkey, the recent years have witnessed a series of widely acclaimed reform packages and constitutional amendments in this ever more de-Christianized, Islamified state.

Despite these developments, most experts agree that Turkey still has a long way to go in order to achieve "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities." In the case of the Aramean people, this part of the Copenhagen criteria, which form the basis in the negotiation process with candidate countries since 1993, exposes Turkey's apparent lack of commitment to Europe's values.

1. The Aramean (Syriac) People of Turkey
Most politicians, journalists, writers and activists are not familiar with the Aramean people and their historical presence in Southeast Turkey. Briefly, five facts are worth stressing:
1.1 Indigenous: Contrary to the Turks and the Kurds, who as latecomers are foreign to Southeast Turkey, the Arameans and their Aramaic language are indigenous to this countryside, as corroborated by written evidence dating back to the 12th century B.C.

1.2 People: Rather than a religious community, the Arameans are a people or stateless nation, and this is how their vast majority increasingly perceive and call themselves. In Turkey, the ethno-religious Arameans historically consist of the Syriac (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), Chaldean and Nestorian (or: 'Assyrian') communities.

1.3 Name: The Syriac Orthodox Patriarch aptly wrote about the synonymy of their names: "The Syriac language is the Aramaic language itself, and the Arameans are the Syrians themselves. He who has made a di-

stinction between them has erred." There exists an academic consensus on this issue, as there also is one that states that 'Assyrian' is a historically unfounded and politicized name that was invented in the 19th century.

1.4 Diaspora: As a result of systematic ethnic cleansing, land theft, persecutions and discrimination by the Turkish State, often with the help of Kurdish auxiliaries, the Arameans fled from their homeland. Today some 25,000 Arameans reside in Turkey, among whom circa 2,500 souls have remained in Southeast Turkey. The number of Aramean Europeans substantially exceeds the number of Arameans in this region.

1.5 Leadership: In the diaspora, particularly in Europe, the Arameans have tasted the delights of true democracy, freedom and equal citizenship. In the secularized and free West, secular organizations emerged in addition to the churches and monasteries aiming at organizing, defending and representing the Aramean people and their rights.

2. The Aramean Question in Turkey
The Aramean Question in Turkey consists of past and present cases of many human rights violations which have never been addressed by Turkey or the international community. Due to limited space, only four sub-questions will be mentioned. Rather than elaborating them, as experts have done many times before, it has been decided to ask Turkey reasonable questions which represent the voice and the desire of the Aramean people. It is hoped that this will initiate an official dialogue with the Turkish Government, conceivably coordinated by the EU.

2.1 Lack of Recognition & Legal Status

1. What is Turkey's position on recognizing the Arameans as a 'minority', in conformity with international law and the Lausanne Treaty from 1923, much like the Greeks, Armenians and Jews, so that they are allowed to establish their own schools, teach their Aramaic language and freely practice their Chri-

stian faith?

2. What is Turkey's view on recognizing the Arameans as an 'indigenous people', in keeping with the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples signed by Turkey in 2007 and explicitly stated in Resolution 1704 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe?

2.2 Illegal Land Occupation

3. What is Turkey's stance towards the continuation of the illegal expropriation by the State of huge amounts of land historically and legally belonging to the Arameans, as affirmed by the European Union and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe?

4. When will Turkey end the delays of court cases, noted by the European Court of Human Rights Annual Report 2009, that Aramean monasteries, villages and proprietors are facing?

2.3 Endangered Aramaic Cultural Heritage

5. Is the Turkish Government willing to take any responsibility in restoring, safeguarding, developing and promoting the endangered Aramaic cultural heritage of Southeast Turkey?

6. Is the Turkish Government prepared to assist and facilitate the Arameans who originate from Turkey in preserving their threatened language, culture and identity?

2.4 Return Migration: The Future of Tur-Abdin

7. Is Turkey ready to invest structurally in its south-eastern terrain, above all in improving the security, infrastructure and facilities for normal life circumstances there that may draw Aramean refugees back to the land of their ancestors?

8. Can Turkey ensure that the Tur-Abdin region in Southeast Turkey remains populated by its original Aramean inhabitants in the next decades, if not centuries?



The Arameans, above all, ask for equal citizenship, based on a new constitution that meets the standards of the EU and which laws will effectively be implemented. They strive for the recognition of their people and historic presence in Southeast Turkey. They ask not to be treated as foreigners or as a fifth-column by Turkish society, led by the mainstream media and biased textbooks.

3. The ball is in Turkey's court

The Arameans have an ancient history in Turkey and are one of the oldest Christian peoples in the world. Despite genocide, mistreatment and discrimination, they have always remained loyal and peaceful citizens. Noting that the Christian Arameans have fled from their homeland and in the past decades have frequently expressed the desire to be officially recognized by the Turkish Government as a 'minority', according to the Lausanne Treaty, in order to obtain a legal status so that they can start building up a future in their ancestral land, Turkey can now demonstrate how sincere its commitments to the values and principles of the EU truly are.

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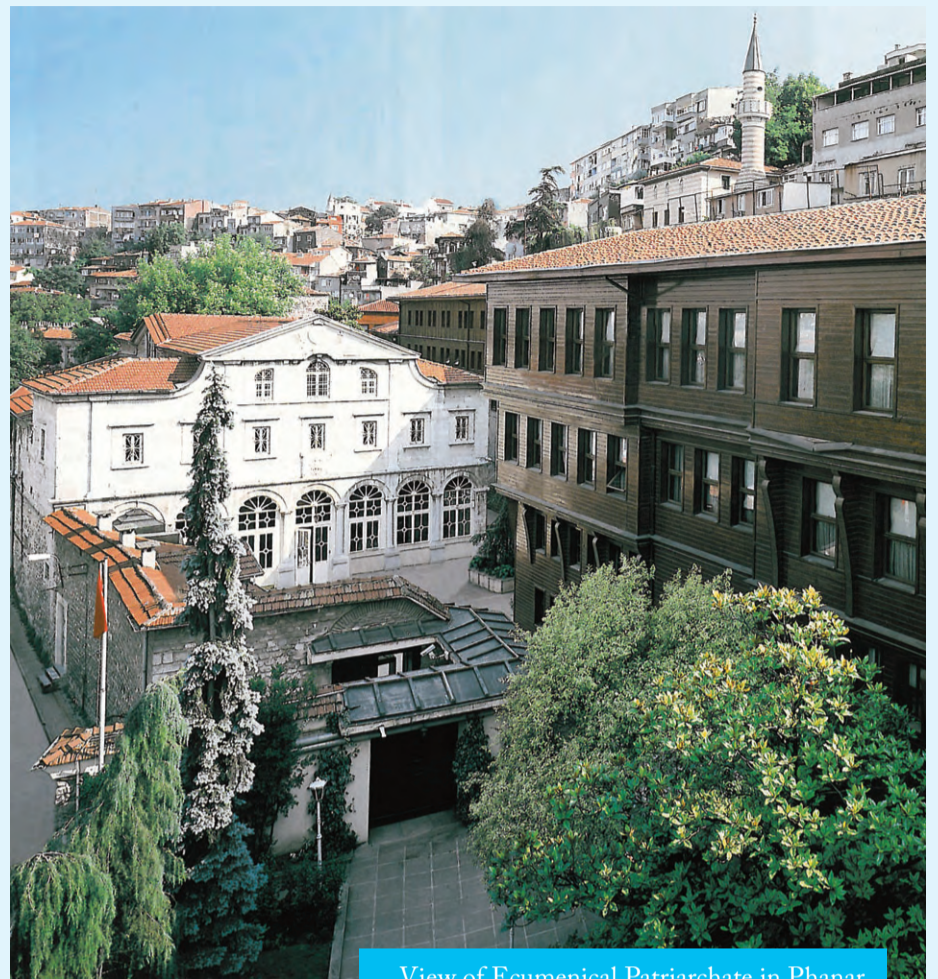
Between the seventh and tenth centuries A.D., the Arameans brought the Mesopotamian and Greek sciences to the Arabs who later exported this knowledge to Europe. Perhaps with their Christian background and as a people that has integrated most successfully in European countries, the Arameans may once again form a bridge between two civilizations, this time between Turkey and the EU. In any case, the ball of democratization is in Turkey's court.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is the highest see and holiest center of the Orthodox Christian Church throughout the world. It is an institution with a history spanning seventeen centuries, during which it retained its see in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul). It constitutes the center of all the local Orthodox Churches, heading these not by administration but by virtue of its primacy in the ministry of pan-Orthodox unity and the coordination of the activity of the whole of Orthodoxy.

The function of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as center par excellence of the life of the entire Orthodox world emanates from its centuries-old ministry in the witness, protection and outreach of the Orthodox faith. The Ecumenical Patriarchate therefore possesses a supra-national and supra-regional character. From this lofty consciousness and responsibility for the people of Christ, regardless of race and language, were born the new regional Churches of the East, from the Caspian to the Baltic, and from the Balkans to Central Europe. This activity today extends to the Far East, to America and Australia.

Orthodox Christians on all continents, which do not fall under the jurisdiction of the autocephalous (independent) or autonomous (semi-independent) Churches, fall under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The most important of the autocephalous Churches are the ancient Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem (together with the ancient Archdiocese of Mt. Sinai), the Patriarchates of Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Georgia, as well as the Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Albania, and the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia. The autonomous Churches include those of Finland and of Estonia. Consequently, the Orthodox Churches in Europe, America, Australia and Britain, which are not under the jurisdiction of the aforementioned autocephalous Churches, lie within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. All Orthodox feel that they are constituents of one essentially spiritual community, wherein "when one member suffers, so do all." It is a true sense of unity in diversity.



View of Ecumenical Patriarchate in Phanar.

History of the Ecumenical Patriarchate



"Sultan Mehmed II confirming rights of Ecumenical Patriarch Gennadius II."

Following the establishment of Constantinople (the ancient city of Byzantium) as the state capital of the Roman Empire in the early part of the fourth century, a series of significant ecclesiastical events saw the status of the Bishop of the new Rome (as Constantinople was then called) elevated to its current position and privilege. The Church of Constantinople is traditionally regarded as being founded by St. Andrew, the "first called" of the Apostles. The 3rd canon of the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople (381) conferred upon the bishop of this city second rank after the Bishop of Rome.

Less than a century later, the 28th canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council held in Chalcedon (451) offered Constantinople equal ranking to Rome and special responsibilities throughout the rest of the world and expanding its jurisdiction to territories hitherto unclaimed.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate holds an honorary primacy among the autocephalous, or ecclesiastically independent, Churches. It enjoys the privilege of serving as "first among equals." It is also known as the "Roman" Patriarchate (hence the Turkish phrase: Rum Patrikhanesi), recalling its historical source as the Church of New Rome, the new capital of the Roman Empire, transferred in 330 from Old Rome to Byzantium by Constantine

the Great. The first bishop of the city of Byzantium was St. Stachys (38-54), a disciple of the Apostle Andrew. In 330, Byzantium was renamed Constantinople and New Rome, while its bishopric was elevated to an archbishopric. The Metropolitan of Heraclea, to whom Byzantium was for-

merly subject, now came under the jurisdiction of Constantinople and enjoyed the privileges of the latter's most senior see.

As a title, the phrase "Ecumenical Patriarchate" dates from the sixth century and belongs exclusively to the Archbishop of Constantinople. The Great Schism of 1054—in fact the culmination of a gradual estrangement over many centuries—resulted in formal separation between the Churches of the East and the West, granting Constantinople sole authority and jurisdiction over the Orthodox Churches throughout the world.

After the capture of Constantinople by the Latins during the Fourth Crusade (1204), the Ecumenical Patriarchate was transferred to Nicaea (1206), but Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos restored it to Constantinople when he recaptured the city in 1261. When Constantinople became the capital of the Ottoman Empire in 1453, the Ecumenical Patriarch (at the time, Gennadius II) was recognized as Ethnarch of the Orthodox peoples, with increased authority over the Eastern Patriarchates and the Balkan Churches, as well as farther afield.

From that time, the Ecumenical Patriarchate became a symbol of unity, rendering service and solidarity to the Eastern Churches. In difficult periods, the Ecumenical Patriarchate was consulted for the resolution of problems. Frequently, patriarchs of other Churches would reside in Constantinople, which was the venue for meetings of the Holy Synod that was chaired by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate also sponsored missionary growth through the centuries, the most notable of which was the conversion of the Kievan Rus in the tenth century and the most recent of which was the missionary work in Southeast Asia in the last century. This pastoral role and responsibility has earned the characterization of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as "the golden beacon of Orthodoxy, preserving the unwaning brilliance of Christianity."

Currently, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is actively engaged in diverse ecclesiastical activities and ministries. It has historically proved to be a dynamic leader in the ecumenical movement, fully participating in the World Council of Churches from its inception, as well as in local ecumenical bodies, instituting and chairing bilateral theological dialogues with non-Orthodox Christians but also with other monotheistic faiths.