INCITEMENT TO RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS HATRED - ISLAMOPHOBIA
COJEP INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM
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Remarks by Ambassador Ömür Orhun, Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office
of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on
Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

Introduction

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to COJEP International not only for organizing this colloquium, but more importantly for their dedicated work in addressing the problems faced by Muslim communities in Europe and for their efforts to raise awareness to find solutions to these problems. This is the third COJEP meeting that I am attending, and in each we were able to tackle different aspects of Islamophobia.

In this session, we will be concentrating on incitement to racial and religious hatred, with special emphasis on political discourse. I am sure we will also address positive measures to deal with this issue.

At the outset I want to differentiate between discrimination and profiling which would amount to a hate crime, and discrimination and profiling which would not necessarily be a crime, but which would lead to hate, stigmatization, different treatment or prejudice.

However, the net result of both is an affront to human dignity.

Hate Crimes

Hate is a strong term, which goes beyond prejudice, dislike, contempt, ridicule or anger. To stir up hatred, words, behaviour or material used must be threatening, abusive or insulting. Various manifestations of hate continue to pose a threat also to security and stability

in the Euro-Atlantic region. Every year, thousands of persons or their property become victims of hate-motivated incidents and crimes. It is well known that the impact of these crimes is always broader than the actual victim or the damaged property. By their nature, hate crimes are committed not only against their immediate victims, but against the entire community to which the victims belong. Unfortunately, Muslims and Muslim communities are now the number one target of hate crimes. Muslims are also often victims of negative stereotyping and are vulnerable to manifestations of prejudice, which can only be corrected through a sound and sustained educative process and through changing mentalities.

Muslims face hatred in the forms of threats, violent attacks and property damage. The burden to correct this situation would mainly fall on the shoulders of law enforcement authorities, but as this is a multi-faceted issue, we need multi-dimensional measures and concrete tools for sustainable solutions. Let me also underline that what is needed is dedicated and comprehensive measures, but not face saving temporary remedies.

<u>Islamophobia</u>

International human rights standards and norms call for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and racism. Prohibition of discrimination is also a basic principle of the international law.

However, as is the case with some other vulnerable groups, Muslim communities especially in Western Europe and Northern America are experiencing an increasingly hostile environment towards them, coupled with discrimination and intolerance in various forms.

This environment started to be more pronounced in the post September 11 period and is characterized by suspicion, prejudice, ignorance, negative or patronizing imaging, and discrimination, including in education, housing and employment. Stereotyping all Muslims as "terrorist, violent or otherwise unfit", lack of provision, recognition and respect for Muslims in public institutions, and attacks, abuse, harassment and violence against persons perceived to be Muslim and against their property and prayer places are other aspects of this deplorable situation.

This phenomena is also called Islamophobia, which can be defined in short as "fear or suspicion of Islam, Muslims and matters pertaining to them"

Discrimination and intolerance against Muslims have devastating effects not only on the daily lives of the Muslim communities, but also on the societies where they live.

To remedy this negative and disturbing phenomenon, sound strategies and educational approaches must be developed and vigorously implemented. Increasing understanding and respect for cultural and religious diversity would be the first step in identifying and developing criteria for good practices in combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. On the other hand, dual aspect of the rise of Islamophobia; on the one hand its intellectual legitimization and on the other hand tolerance shown to this legitimization, should be well recognized and countered. Reality and seriousness of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims must also be accepted. Otherwise this trend will result in the crystallization of cultural and religious differences. In order to effectively combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, condemnation must be accompanied by effective legislative and judicial measures as well as with education.

Manifestations of Anti-Muslim Sentiment in Political Discourse

In this part of my presentation, I will also be utilizing the conclusions of the NGO Roundtable which the ODIHR and myself organized in May 2006 on representation of Muslims in public discourse.

With regard to stereotyping and xenophobic and discriminatory language in political discourse, two key developments need to be underlined; an increase in the use of such discourse by *mainstream* politicians recently, and the rise of extremist parties on the right in both local and national governments in many Western European states - a situation less likely 20 years ago. As a response to the increasing share of votes given to far-right parties, many mainstream parties began to adopt elements of the rhetoric and public policies espoused by these parties, for example on immigration issues. Essentially, over the last two decades the use of xenophobic and inflammatory language has moved from the fringe to the centre of the political spectrum. A notable shift has occurred in the way that mainstream politicians and political parties talk about immigration and multiculturalism, and specifically

in the way that one particular group - Muslims - have been singled out as an alleged threat to 'Western' societies. The increasing trend towards a 'culturalist discourse' and 'rhetoric of conflict' must also be underlined; by saying this, I refer to a development whereby debates on immigrant and ethnic minorities, and particularly Muslims, focus upon irreconcilable cultural and civilizational differences with the effect of drawing boundaries between cultures and marking Muslims as the 'other'. Many examples of how this culturalist discourse is used by mainstream political leaders can be found. Such discourse clearly implies the existence of two competing identities that are fundamentally irreconcilable and serve to exacerbate existing obstacles in the path of integration.

The events of 9/11 further reinforced and accelerated this movement. Since 9/11, the widespread belief that Islam and democracy are incompatible has permeated throughout Europe. On the extreme-right, but also within the ranks of several democratic parties, the "*clash of civilizations*" theory became central to the discourse and agenda. Significantly, these parties are not fascist, have no common history with the extreme-right, are inside the political system rather than on the fringe, but have a very specific target - the Muslim – whether he or she is an immigrant or citizen, practicing Muslim or not.   To counter such trends, governments must acknowledge that xenophobic and anti-Muslim elements are increasingly used in *mainstream* political discourse, and draw clear lines between acceptable and unacceptable rhetoric, as has been done with regard to racism and Antisemitism. Political signals from local and national leaders which include the use of language that could stir up prejudice, hatred or hostility are a paramount concern due to their impact on media reporting, on ethnic and religious minorities and on public perceptions and societal attitudes.
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Correlations between Anti-Muslim Discourse and Public Policy

What are the implications of anti-Muslim discourse on public policy, and what effect do public policies have on public perceptions and public discourse? Two key areas – discourse and policies on migration, integration and multiculturalism on the one hand, and discourse and public policy in the context of the 'war on terror' on the other hand need to be underlined.

Overall, negative public discourse reinforces discriminatory policies in the private sector and public institutions, and simultaneously discriminatory policies also affects public

perceptions, opinions and discourse on Muslims and the Islamic faith. For instance, introduction of 'citizenship tests' reinforced perceptions of Muslims as alien from Western societies and contributed to a climate of increasing intolerance for cultural and ethnic diversity.

Direct correlation between official public discourse on issues such as immigration, integration and multiculturalism and the adoption of legislation and policies that discriminates against Muslims is a point that should be mentioned in this regard. In Europe, the association of national identity with ethnic identity makes it difficult for states to incorporate new communities into their national self-definition and historical narrative - after generations of living in Germany one may still be seen as a Turk, and in France as an Algerian as opposed to a national of the country. Additionally, the political discourse in many European countries still challenges the notion that that country is a country of immigration. As a result, minority groups tend to be excluded from the official narratives of some states and this ambivalence and struggle around national identity is often reflected in the lack of coherent and managed integration strategies adopted by many states.   As a result, integration in many parts of Europe has in reality remained more of a one-way than two-way street with the onus placed upon Muslim communities.   Muslims have been blamed in both media and political commentaries for not working harder to integrate or participate in the mainstream, and moderate Muslim groups blamed for not being visible or active enough. In doing so, some governments have largely failed to recognize that integration requires managed strategies, that the enactment of relevant policies and measures should be the responsibility of the state, and that most persons, given the opportunity, want to integrate and participate in the cultural, social and political fabric. States should provide the space and capacity to facilitate the integration process through the inclusion of Muslims in the official public discourse and policies of the state.

Multicultural policies have also come under increasing strain in recent years, most notably since the London bombings of July 2005. National political figures, community leaders and media commentators have criticized multiculturalism for keeping communities apart and for providing 'too much space to Muslims'. Far-right parties, and to some extent mainstream parties, have been successful in making political capital out of these issues, such as in the case of the introduction of citizenship 'loyalty' tests for Muslims and other minority groups. While multiculturalism implies a 'common sense of belonging', many Muslim

communities across Europe have experienced a marked deterioration in their sense of belonging and an increased sense of marginalization and exclusion from society. Media and political statements which propagate the conspiracy theory known as 'Eurabia' or which serve to reinforce messages of the 'otherness' of Muslims have had a powerful impact on perceptions of migrants and immigration policy; calls for halting immigration from the Muslim world have become increasingly louder and accepted in the mainstream. For example, 2005 riots in France were initially interpreted as a clash of cultures, while the socio-economic dimensions of the conflict were largely ignored.

I must also draw attention to language employed in public discourse which adds to the 'religious colouration' given to terrorism, including statements made by mainstream public figures – academics, politicians and community leaders – which suggests that Muslims are hard-wired for violence and that the Islamic faith inclines towards militancy. Public statements and media language which refer to Muslim fundamentalism, Islamic terrorism and Islamo-Fascism taint all Muslims as threats to national security, and can be used to legitimize curtailments of civil liberties and due process of law in the context of the 'war on terror'. Another issue is the creation of a discourse of 'the other' and of the 'enemy within' which has been used to publicly justify domestic policies in the fight against terrorism that disproportionately impact particular communities and which have effectively resulted in the creation of separate criminal justice systems. Official political discourse which creates a sense of 'us' and 'them' is deepening divides and increasing alienation, just as acts of terror committed under the pretext of religion further increase xenophobia.

While public discourse can and does affect policies, public policy equally has an impact upon public discourse and perceptions. Policies and measures enacted in the 'war on terror' - curtailment of civil rights and citizenship rights; introduction of detention without trial, internment and extraordinary rendition - tend to disproportionately impact Muslims, create images of alien and suspect communities and give the impression that two separate criminal justice systems have been created. Integration and citizenship laws have also been deployed as an adjunct to counter-terror laws. It is recommended, therefore, that all official policies including security and counter-terrorism legislation should be checked for their racial equality dimension.

Policies and Measures to Create a More Balanced & Inclusive Representation of   Muslims

Both official policies and official discourse must acknowledge demographic changes in Europe. Europe needs a new self-identity and a new concept of "self" based upon an acknowledgement of the contributions of all the different groups – the starting point being the formal educational system. Creating a new inclusive history and narrative of Europe could entail reviewing curricula and school materials for bias or limited interpretations of history, and creating a more complete account of the historical and present day links between 'European' and 'Islamic' civilizations including Islamic contributions to music, art and science and the sustained interaction that has shaped the Europe we have today. The teaching of an 'inclusive human history' would help to move away from an 'us' and 'them' approach.

On integration policy, the similarity between labour migration patterns of Muslims in many European countries in the 1950s and 1960s due to a demand for industrial labour is striking. When those sectors began to collapse in the 1960s, many found themselves unemployed and effectively trapped in poorer inner city areas.   These socio-economic inequalities have been a significant factor in the development of so-called self-styled self-segregation of Muslim communities and pose significant barriers to integration.   By over-emphasizing cultural differences, multicultural policies have failed to address larger questions relating to differences in socio-economic equalities and opportunities. Policies to address marginalization should focus on providing communities with education, empowerment, equality of opportunities and confidence in social institutions.   This is a vital factor in reversing the increasing alienation and radicalization within certain sections of Muslim communities today.

Muslim communities must also take responsibility for mobilizing and participating in political processes in order to effect change in both policies and the official discourse. In this respect, the impact of counter-terror policies and measures on the perceptions of communities and specifically their trust in the 'system' should not be overlooked. How these communities perceive governmental action towards them, whether real or not, influence how and whether Muslim communities choose to participate in political and other processes.

While saying that governments should encourage responsible public discourse especially by politicians, I am not suggesting that the states should also regulate media. However, NGOs could offer training initiatives that promote intercultural understanding and mutual respect without compromising freedom of speech.

On the other hand, states which recognize Islam as an official religion can generate positive effects on public discourse as Muslim communities will be able to speak on their own behalf. Muslim communities, on their turn, should more proactively engage with public and social institutions in their host countries; work on tolerance and non-discrimination issues within the larger human rights movement; and take steps to ensure to retain independence from governments in the Islamic world and recognize that their priorities lie in Europe. Muslim communities also should not import problems of the Islamic world to Europe and similarly they should not look for solutions to their challenges in the Islamic world but seek 'home-grown' solutions. On the other hand, political leaders must not attempt to 'socially engineer' Muslim leadership and to create an 'acceptable Islam' or a so-called European Islam.

Improving the Representation of Muslims in Political Discourse

I would like to stress that political leadership has an important role to play in improving the representation of Muslim communities in political discourse. In order to counter the negative public perception of Muslims, politicians and local community leaders should take a strong stance against language that portrays Muslims as 'alien' or security threats and resist the temptation to curtail civil liberties. Political leaders also need to avoid blaming Muslims for the phenomena of terrorism, which only serves to heighten fear and hostility to Muslims. On the positive side, political leaders should seek to research and address the root causes of terrorism, such as lack of democracy and freedom, injustice, poverty, alienation and deprivation. Additionally, efforts to promote greater understanding and awareness about religion and multiculturalism should be intensified.

I need also to underscore that the responsibility of improving the representation of Muslims in political discourse rests to some degree on the shoulders of Muslim civil society,

who need to increase engagement and political participation in local and national structures. Greater political representation would allow for advocacy on behalf of the mainstream Muslim community and for engagement with issues relating to civil rights, inclusion and empowerment and to redress grievances. Another major challenge for Muslim communities and governmental authorities is to improve government-civil society dialogue and partnerships. In this regard, the issue of how Muslim communities could prove an asset to governments as opposed to a threat is important. Muslim communities would be considered a threat if they were 'only speaking to themselves', allow radicalisation to occur amongst youth, and are unable to deal with emerging identity crises they are faced with. Conversely, Muslim communities could be viewed as an asset if they can engage successfully in partnership with governmental authorities and in coalition-building with other communities on broader social issues.

Active participation and dialogue represent the means for Muslim communities to engage with problem-solving at the domestic level and to show that they can be part of the solution to challenges relating to integration, multiculturalism, radicalization, exclusion and terrorism. *It is up to both Muslim communities and the governments to choose whether to engage or disengage in dialogue and partnerships.* A common language between government and community based organizations is essential for dialogue. For instance, terms such as Islamists or Islamo-fascism give religious legitimacy to extremists by putting the *islamo-* or *islam-* prefix before their action.

To summarize the forward-looking approaches to dealing with discriminatory or biased public discourse and public policies, I would like to stress that both formal and non-formal education and awareness-raising programmes are key to preventing prejudice, stereotypes and misinformation about Muslim communities. There is no other alternative but to pursue increased engagement and dialogue. Muslim communities should increase their representation and participation in politics, in media programming and in social and public institutions. They should also become increasingly involved in advising and implementing governmental programmes that affect not just Muslim communities but the larger society. Governments should engage a wide and representative set of voices from Muslim communities in consultative discussions on policies that will affect them. Dialogue at the local, national and international fora, including within the OSCE framework, must strive to

include a broad-section of voices from today's pluralistic societies in order to move towards an increasing recognition and realization of the goals of mutual respect and understanding.