

The rise of anti-minorities platforms in Europe

Implications for democracy and human rights

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Today's topic is chosen with great care but also with lot of sadness. Care because mushrooming of anti-minority movements is not a phenomenon which is only common among far right, extremist and racist individuals or groups in Europe. Unfortunately this trend has moved more and more in to the soul and body of the mainstream political parties in European Parliament, national assemblies and in local municipalities.

Sadness because, while the mainstream parties are moving towards the right, even yesterday's left wing parties are now joining anti-minority and anti-Islam chorus.

Today, out of 27 EU Member States, 17 have right wing governments. Influential countries like France, Germany, Poland and Sweden have put in to place very restrictive policies bordering on human rights violation. Italy, Holland and my own country Denmark have openly racist and Islamophobic parties in the Parliament. Their statements, views and preaching are tearing societies apart. In Austria Jörg Haider returned to parliament with 21 seats, three times than 8 years ago. In Norway, the extreme anti-minorities Progressive Party is now the largest in the country and in Belgium,

Vlaams Belang of Filip Dewinter came very close to getting power.

This is just the established parties. Extremist and anti-minorities movements have gained momentum and strength in the last few years. Just a hit on Goggle would give you a shock if you enter racist movements in Europe. European Parliament's Political Affairs Committee in its resolution in 2003 has already warned about this development and declared that no Member State was immune to this threat to democracy.

United Nation in 2005 also took note of the resurgence of xenophobic and populist movements in Europe, warning that it will undermine the civil and liberal values.

Although these right wing political parties and racist movements have different agendas but all most all of them use immigrants, refugees and non-European ethnic and religious minorities as a propaganda tool to scare people, get members and win votes.

The issues of unhindered migration, failed integration, disappointment with multi-culturalism, radicalisation among Muslim youth and last but not least, how identity cultures can again be created, is being discussed heatedly in every country in Europe and also in other Western countries. From powerful political parties, mainstream media outlets, church authorities, university academics and society intellectuals are not only debating complex topics in simplistic terms but are also advancing scare mongering theories.

Interesting enough, those communities which are the subject of these discussions, namely the ethnic and religious minorities from non-European countries are not involved in this process. Not that they are incapable of a reasonable intellectual exchange but because they are all most never invited to sit at the table.

But seen from the ethnic minority perspective, this debate is misleading. The reality of life for ethnic and religious minorities is totally different. This requires that we discuss the following questions.

1. Why Europe is moving in the wrong direction?
2. What role politicians are playing in this negative process and why?
3. What are the living conditions of minorities in EU?
4. Are minorities suffering from racism and discrimination?
5. What can EU institutions do to help?
6. What can ethnic minorities do to change the situation?

Racism in Europe

Racism, discrimination and ill treatment of a human being at the hands of fellow human being is beyond my comprehension. It hurts and it is evil.

Unfortunately, it is happening all around us and is increasing by the day. We all know that Europe does take pride in calling itself humanist, tolerant and democratic. To some extent, it is true. But an overview

of the situation would help to put things in the right perspective.

To do so, would require that we are honest, straightforward and bring to you the worries and difficulties, diverse ethnic and religious groups are experiences now days. You may not agree with my assessments but please, let it be the basis of our dialogue.

As far as racism in Europe is concerned, we are definitely heading in the wrong direction. This is even more alarming when it comes to the treatment of non-European minorities.

On top of this, we are facing a revival in anti-Semitism and further exclusion of Roma people. At the same time race and ethnicity arguments have been replaced by focus on non-European cultures, civilisations and religions, especially Muslim communities and Islam.

In the latest survey conducted by the American Research Center - Pew and published in September 2008, anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim attitudes have been steadily rising in most European countries.

(International Herald Tribune.18.09.2008)

The organisation Human Rights First has published its 2008 Hate Crime Report in 56 OSCE countries. Here are two of its findings;

- The number of violent anti-Semitic assaults in UK were worst since 1984

- Only 5 of out of 56 OSCE countries publicly report violence against Muslims

The report also mentions in detail, hate crimes against other minority groups such as Roma and Homosexual groups.

In many countries, this demonising is now an officially sanctioned; media advanced and publicly accepted fact. In short, a very frightening trend is emerging in political, social, legal and public fields. My own country Denmark is a good example of such horrible development where members of Parliament go on the podium and compare Islam with Nazism, Cancer or plague.

To top it all, media is playing a special role, not only to spread prejudices but also fan the flames of racism by its irresponsible coverage by focusing on group ethnicity, cultures, religions and traditions of minorities. Every individual of non-European background is considered as a representative of its group.

Public opinion polls confirm the negative consequences of such mass hysteria and a significant shift in the political trends. There are very few voices of reason being raised to counter this development.

Surveys and polls

Another dire consequence of this non-stop focus on non-European minorities was discovered and measured by an opinion poll carried out by the American Research

Centre - PEW - in June 4th 2003. The survey points out towards some very disturbing trends.

67% Italians, 60% Germans and 50% French, did not want immigration from Africa, Middle East or East Europe. Only 47% British had the same opinion.

Most Europeans want stricter entry controls on foreigners.

According to another opinion poll conducted by Eurobarometer for the European Commission (New Europe Magazine 14.03.04), 80% of the EU citizens favoured stricter entry restrictions on foreigners from non-EU countries. At the same time, 56% of Europeans recognised the economic need for immigrants and 34% did not want to give equal rights the legal immigrants.

The recent survey conducted by World Economic Forum and released in Jan 2008 and Gallup Poll published in Feb 2008 points to some very disturbing development. Nearly 69% Europeans consider any co-operation with Muslim World as a threat to the West. Luckily according to the same surveys, majority of Muslim World actually appreciate democracy and human rights in the West and wants the same in their own countries but without western interference.

So what are the common issues facing ethnic minorities in Europe.

The present socio-economic situation

My organisation, ENAR prepares a yearly Shadow

Report with the help of its co-ordinations in all EU countries, as to what is happening in member states. The reports are concerning discrimination and which problems it creates. The conclusions from 2004, 2005 and 2006 reports are very clear and the following picture emerges concerning ethnic minorities;

- **Very high unemployment- 20- 50%**
- **Forced concentration in socially deprived areas**
- **Lack of goal oriented education for newcomers**
- **Non-availability of social participation**
- **Disrespect towards non-European cultures & religions**
- **Institutional discrimination (Police, Public Service)**
- **Feeling and experiencing 2nd class status**
- **Rise of far right parties and racist movements**
- **Islamophobic & anti-Semitic atmosphere via daily negative media coverage & political statements**
- **Restrictive Visa, Asylum & Family Reunion laws**

Many EU countries are linking citizenship to good behaviour, pledges of loyalty, and adoption of the western customs and culture.

Looking at such bad situation, it would not be fair to call it; failed integration or that diversity is not possible. Yes, there are diverse groups of people living

in EU who are different- ethnically, culturally and religiously. But the presence of nearly 20 million visible minorities out of 500 million Europeans is a very small number. The fact is that the segregation of minorities to the outer edges of the European societies has made it difficult to create a society which is diverse or inter-cultural. Instead this situation has created an atmosphere of discrimination and racism.

Future is bleak

So now we know, that behind the beautiful democratic, face of Europe hides another reality, which is ugly, racist and inhumane. European politicians are busy accusing immigrants and refugees of threatening the European culture and social welfare. Europe is busy building new barricades around it, making it a "Fort Europa".

Minorities want results

Anti-discrimination is being replaced by new terminology such as integration, diversity and social inclusion. I am a great supporter of these new initiatives, but now the time for fancy campaigns must go hand in hand with concrete actions. Minorities are tired of words. They want results.

We continue to draw the attention of the general public and governments to the fact that racism is on the rise and it has direct effect on the whole process of integration. The general public and governments should be aware of this problem.

We must take a special interest in social inclusion and cultural diversity but cultural diversity does not mean eating Döner Kebab, seeing Belly Dance or listening to Bob Marley's reggae music. To me diversity whether it is cultural, ethnic or religious is that we celebrate and enjoy the difference as well as similarities. We should practice it because we live in a globalise world. Internet, e-mail and fast travel has opened the borders, which can not be closed any longer. Celebrating diversity does not mean that we force the other to accept the way, we do things. It can be only achieved by good examples, co-operation and respect.

But all these actions are a drop in the sea. We need a true people's movement. The Ethnic Minorities and the progressive forces must join hands. This co-operation must be above party politics, political ideologies and without any patronising arrogance.

My experience of 40 years in the West tells me that no matter how bleak the future looks; there is always a ray of hope and a tiny candle of light burning to show us the way. Faith in the best in humanity can move mountains and if we do not loose sight of our goals, one-day the journey will be completed. But it is imperative that the progressive European forces must wake up, because to those much is given, is much required.

I am a passionate believer and advocate of "Mutual Integration" based on respect and accept of the

differences of cultures, faiths, traditions and way of living. But I am also a realist. As long as Europe does not wake up from its past colonial hangover, its supposed cultural superiority and soon get rid of its traditional arrogance towards non-white and non-Christian, it would not succeed in its endeavour to be "A centre of the civilised World".

We must work to build up Europe; a new Europe without prejudices, bubbling with a deeply felt openness.

Europe can create peace and welfare for all and where ethnic minorities are not tolerated but respected as fellow human beings. Racism not only hurts minorities but it also eats the soul of the majority. It is like a boomerang. Sooner or later, it is going to hit all of us in the face.

Moderation of Round Table

I would like to welcome you all and especially Anastasia Crickley and Ambassador Ömür Orhun who has kindly accepted our invitation to share with us their wisdom and many years experience. Both have been engaged in monitoring and analysing racism, discrimination and Islamophobia and have written extensively on these topics.

Both in their official capacities and in personal commitment are well suited to tackle the issue at hand and what can be done about it.