

ENGLISH only

**Undoing Hate Crimes:  
Combating Islamophobia as Cultural Terrorism**

by  
Dr. Bülent Şenay<sup>1</sup>

*The key words: Islamophobia, Undoing, Anti-Muslim Hate Crime, and Cultural Terror.*

Dear Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Delegates

**Undoing** is a defence mechanism in which a person tries to 'undo' an unhealthy, destructive or otherwise threatening thought, action and attitude by engaging in contrary behaviour. For example, after thinking about being violent with someone, one would then be overly nice or accommodating to them.

In Europe today, it is the Muslim who are asked to answer for crimes that they never committed, they still face the daily vilification of their way of life in the mainstream media, they are still stereotyped, discriminated against, and victims of hate crimes, vandalism, and verbal abuse. If we ignore Islamophobia today, we will have be ignoring the struggle of our fellow human beings, as well as our own responsibility to speak out against injustice wherever it occurs.

We should **UNDO Islamophobic hate crimes** through various means and methods, from the level of governments to NGOs. UNDOING hate crimes is what is meant by the implementation of commitments **by participating States in OSCE**.

The recent historic expansion of the European Union (EU) has brought to focus issues relating to European Muslims, raising questions about the impact of the expansion on their current and future conditions.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims in Europe are part of the fabric of society. Like other groups, Muslims have certain peculiarities that distinguish them from the rest of society. Irrespective of their cultural heritage or religion, all these other groups remain an integral part of the society, which has become a mosaic of cultures, creeds, nationalities and religions. Dialogue, co-existence, and even conflict govern the relationships between them, but none is excluded or marginalized as a minority. This should also apply to the Muslim populations of the EU countries.

European Muslims do not represent a transient historical phenomenon, and there is no evidence of a decline in their presence. On the contrary, there are many indications that the Muslim presence in Europe will increase. According to European and UN studies, the results of these drastic demographic changes in European countries will play themselves out in the coming decades. Amongst the factors that contribute to this change is the increase in European Muslim birth rates in comparison with those of other groups. Other projected changes are a decrease in the working-age population and an increase of the retiring-age

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bülent Şenay, professor of history of religion&Islamic studies, is currently president of Diyanet Islamic Foundation in The Hague, the Netherlands.

population - a situation that is impossible to balance without opening the door to immigrants, which can hardly be achieved without including millions of Muslim immigrants.

Major European cities provide amazing sceneries to us. Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, London, and now Istanbul, will perhaps strike the visitor who has not been out from his/her own `quarter` as threatening, but also offer charmingly exotic mixture of cultural/religious colors, the Doner Kebab restaurants, the women in black in their hijab, the halal food shops, the Aladdin cafes, the Marhaba minimarkets. The visitor will be offered durum kabaab, falafel, and will soon realize that Mecca Cola perhaps has already replaced Coca-cola in these parts. The visitor will pass by mosques, though not many, since most are in side streets or in suburbs. Music is also an essential part of this scene. The Turkish rappers in Rotterdam and Berlin compete with the French Algerian rappers in Paris.

However, what we see is an everincreasing **Islamophobia**. It is a gift to us from the politics of fear and hate. We have two words combined into two here: Islamophobia. **Islam** is a religion, faith, and worldview. **Phobia** is “a persistent, abnormal, and irrational fear of a specific thing or situation that compels one to avoid it, despite the awareness and reassurance that it is not dangerous.” Therefore the use of the word "Islamophobia" implies that the fear of Islam is irrational.

**Islamophobia is present in different ways in different countries.** The reasons for the situations are various, it can be because the nation is y homogeneous, like in Sweden, or there are other big problems like in Romania ana Hungary who struggle with Romaphobia. Somewhere Muslims and Christians can live together like in Bulgaria. In some countries Islamophobia is strongly present in the media (Denmark), in some countries even politicians are Islamophobic (The Netherlands, Belgium, France), and in some countries Muslims have to face verbal or direct abuse (Belgium, France, United Kingdom, Bosnia-Herzegovina). In general, it was evident that 11th September 2001 made everything worse.

Since 9/11 Muslims in Western Europe have often been unfairly stigmatised as subversive threats to state security and social cohesion, sometimes characterised as a fifth column. I do not suggest that this **stigmatisation** did not exist before 9/11, still less do we argue that it revolves solely around the issues of security and social cohesion, but we do claim that the response to 9/11 – ‘the war on terror’ – and much of the rhetoric that has surrounded it has played a significant part in increasing the public perception of European Muslims as potential enemies rather than potential partners and neighbours.

Yet I would like to point out that Islamophobia in Europe goes farther back before 9/11. There are unfortunately deeper roots of Islamophobia in European history parallel to the history of anti-Semitism. **Islamophobia is deeply rooted in European orientalist anti-Semitic essentialism.** Unfortunately anti-Islamic prejudice is almost a perennial, entrenched phenomenon in European history, and the Orientalist modes of discourse are relatively constant over time. Orientalist discourse up until the Enlightenment was predominantly Christian-led, and the language and discursive field were primarily religious and theological, with Muhammad, the Qur’an, and Islamic theology being the main areas of discussion. Medieval European Christian anti-Islamism was anti-Semitic because Jews were seen as the allies of the Muslim in the medieval times.

Unlike other parts of the world, Europe has a long history of conflict with Islam, and this has clearly influenced the development and evolution of its views of Islam. The colonial period gave rise to more geographically- and politically-oriented forms of Orientalism; **anti-Muslim discourse** now embraced a new function which has been amply documented in Said's Orientalism: the justification of the imperial project, with a corresponding need to their need to be "civilized" and "enlightened"). (Ernest Renan's famous lecture on "Islam and Science" (delivered at the Sorbonne in 1883). **Most of the depictions showed Islam as antithetical to reason, progress, creativity and reform, was an early example of such attitudes.** *In the postcolonial period, postmodernism has had conflicting and contradictory results, its championing of the "underdog" having a leveling effect with regard to genders, sexualities and races and (in theory at least) giving a voice to oppressed and disadvantaged minorities.* In light of global inequalities, Muslims may be seen as such minorities, both internationally and in Western nation-states. The dominance of human rights discourse offers hope to dispossessed Muslims but can also give rise to the construction of Islam as politically repressive and intolerant (continuing the colonialist theme of the Oriental despotic ruler) show the irrationality, barbarity, obscurantism and backwardness of Muslims and Islam. **However we should not downplay or ignore the fact that both historically and in the present, other foes such as Jews, gypsies or rival Christian sects, have been equally demonized at different times.**

Islamophobia is certainly not a new phenomenon in Europe. Non-governmental organisations have also reported more serious incidents of hate crimes targeting Muslims – ranging from verbal threats to physical attacks on persons or property. Islamophobia as negative behaviour towards Islam and Muslims includes 'hostility', 'violence', 'rejection', 'exclusion', and 'discrimination'. It is also related to the question of **attitude**. The major characteristic of an attitude is its affective nature. An attitude is 'the amount of affect for or against some object' (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975: 11) and 'is simply a person's general feeling of favourableness or unfavourableness' (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980: 54). Among the European youth, Islamophobia is partly the result of frequently received negative messages about the Islam and Muslims from the grandparents, parents, favourite teacher, one's best friend, and the mass media. It can also partly be explained by a low level of knowledge, having negative beliefs, and negative emotions with respect to Islam and Muslims. Islamophobia can again be explained by the **perception** that Islam and Muslims threaten concrete and symbolic interests, such as labour market opportunities, safety, and European cultural values. Islamophobia does, therefore, refer both to a negative attitude towards Islam, as well as to followers of Islam – Muslims.

As indicated by the 2nd OIC Report on Islamophobia, the defamation of religions, as it manifests itself in the assault of Islamophobia in the West, is not limited to the realm of religion per se as an abstract idea that could be a legitimate target of criticism and mockery. On the contrary, **the real consequences of this defamation is an outright campaign of hate speech, and negative stereotyping, targeting all the tenets and adherents of Islam, individually and collectively.** It depicts them as vicious, uncivilized and terrorists. **The tool used to reach this goal is concealed under the banner of the freedom of expression.** In real life, the target of this campaign of defamation is every Muslim's identity, honour, self-worth, and self-confidence. Islamophobia triggers a cultural attitude in which anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural and normal.

This attitude eventually turns into a form of **cultural terrorism** by media and some politicians. The cultural terrorist, an assassin of the future, an executioner of morality.

Cultural terrorism, an attitude, a state of mind - not a set of values to be dogmatically followed. Cultural terrorism is a celebration of the power of the individual.

The aim of the **cultural terrorist** is to pollute the minds of the public, to sow the seeds of insanity into society. Their victims are of all ages - everybody from the cradle to the grave. Man cannot bear too much reality and as a result of this the cultural terrorist is in the business of providing a reality attack. An over exposure of reality - the dirt behind the day dream. No subject is taboo, all must be exposed. No one is sacred. Everybody as well as everything should feel the wrath of the cultural terrorist. The object of cultural terrorism is to exploit situations and people in order to cause a reaction, preferably negative. Their aim is to prevent humanity from ever acting with a common will and good.

**Islamophobists are cultural terrorists.** The cultural terrorist's weapons are anything that enables him to inflict his views upon others. Be it film, video, audio cassettes, music, photocopiers, printed words, pictures - any media whatsoever is acceptable as long as it achieves the objective. They are little concerned how violent, how perverted, how degenerate, how much our material appeals to the very lowest of emotions, or how much the material twists and pollutes fresh young minds and further warps those already in trouble. They believe nothing is impossible, there is no god, there is no morality so they manipulate the environment to its fullest extent. CONFUSION is the key word for the Islamophobist, for the cultural terrorist.

Today, putting aside the new Romanian, Polish, Bulgarian immigrants and their potential future problems –social and religious (polish catholics and Romanian-Bulgarian orthodox), many Muslim immigrants of 2009 and 2010 live in quarters mostly separate from those of the host societies. This is true for big and small cities. Let us remember that, at the end of the day, immigrants from Muslim countries came to Europe for a better life, not to set up an Islamic state. They want a successful and happy life for their kids. It is also important to remember that we have to be careful when we speak about Muslim communities. To what extent is it accurate to speak in terms of Muslim `communities`, since they come from different parts of the world? **The Muslim communities in Europe are anything but monolithic.** Except in France they have no common language; few have a command of Arabic.

Also I would like to ask **HOW orthodox are European Muslims?** Depending on the definition of the word `religious`, it is possible to find through surveys that not many Muslims are practicing or orthodox in their daily life. Muslim communities are not evenly distributed over the various European countries. Although there is no single homogeneous Islam or a community of Muslims that would pose threat to Europe as such, there is no doubt that Islamophobia is a major problem facing both Muslim minority communities and Western societies. It is a divisive issue and a breeding ground for mistrust, hatred and extremism. Some in the West tend to ignore it as a form of “Muslim exceptionalism.” But this is the wrong diagnosis. Islamophobia is a real problem lived by real, ordinary people. And it is a form of racism and discrimination. It must be fought to defend the agenda of human rights for all.

A final solution can only come **through education and legislation.** In order to meet the Islamophobic prejudices on a broader front, education systems should offer more factual knowledge about Islam (and other religions). The importance of teaching about “other” religions has been stressed repeatedly during the seminars the **Council of Europe** organised

with the participation of religious leaders. Education on religions and Islam in particular should also focus on the theme of living together and otherness. The theme of foreignness fulfils the overriding function of **Otherization**, polarizing categories of humanity into “Us” and “Them.” The new generation Europeans should come to terms with the fact that they will live side by side with Muslims.

This past summer has seen an increasing number of anti-Muslim measures directed **against Muslims in Europe**. There has been the ban on minarets in Switzerland, legislated in the face of elite opinion by that distinctive institution of Swiss democracy, the popular referendum. There has been the ban on garments covering the face by the lower house of the French parliament. It is noteworthy that there are relatively few Muslims in Switzerland, while France has the highest Muslim population in Europe. In recent weeks/months **the Muslim issue** has erupted very visibly in the Netherlands and in Germany. In the former country, long known for its tolerance of minorities, a populist party led by Geert Wilders has become a major political force. There has been no similar development in Germany, at least as yet. But the publication of a book by Thilo Sarrazin, a mainstream banker and a member of the Social Democratic Party, has unleashed a storm of controversy. Both Wilders and Sarrazin discuss immigration in general, but their sharpest comments focus on Muslim immigrants.

This paper is of the opinion that **a growing European Muslim population makes significant and valuable contributions to the safety, prosperity and cohesion of European communities and countries and to the well being of Europe as a whole.**

There should be no double talk or hesitation in rejecting the position currently held by too many commentators: that European Muslims, Islam and strict adherence to Islam poses a threat to the safety, cohesion and well being of communities and countries in Europe. **Islamophobia today is the strongest form of hate crime, and has to be recognized legally as such.**

The term ‘hate crime’ covers criminal acts committed with a hate or bias motive, i.e. a discriminatory motive based on prejudices and hatred of the victims’ ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation. The Penal Codes in many European cities have now included aggravating sentencing clause when a crime is committed with a discriminatory motive. Whether it's a crime based on ethnicity, race, religion, or sexual orientation, hate crimes are an insult to humanity. They go against our basic human right to be different. Hate crimes go beyond racial slurs or discrimination. They include physical injury, kidnapping, even sexual assault and murder. Hate crime victimizes not only the target of the crime, but a group that the victim represents, such as their religion, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity or gender. A hate crime is **a bias-motivated** crime that can instill fear and cause the suffering and humiliation of the members of an entire group.

A hate crime does not necessarily involve murder, a violent attack or destruction of property, but may be more subtle. This is what I also call **psychological terror**, and if committed by politicians or media, you can even call it ‘cultural political terrorism’. Grassroot work is essential against hate-crime. All begins by raising awareness in local neighborhood and community. We also need to generate literature or pamphlets to people that you make or that you have obtained from an organization that works to prevent hate crimes. Another thing to do is to organize some sort of awareness at local schools and churches to help combat ignorance and lack of tolerance. Muslim communities’ concern with political agendas that

view Muslims principally through lenses of ‘security’ or ‘cohesion’ – agendas which, unchecked, can serve to stigmatise, alienate and isolate inhabitants of European countries who happen to be Muslim.

It is important for those who are responsible with **public policies** to first determine and define:

1. the nature and scale of Anti-Muslim hate crimes in European societies
2. motivation of anti-Muslim hate crimes
3. location and timing of anti-Muslim hate crimes
4. identity and descriptions of Muslim victims
5. relationship between racist hate-crimes and anti-Muslim hate crimes

Based on such analysis, there should be a list of recommendations for the police, the politicians, and the media.

We all know that minority of mainstream politicians display Islamophobic attitudes that unwittingly license anti-Muslim hate crimes. Governments therefore should afford same recognition and status to anti-Muslim hate crimes as all other hate crimes. **Islamophobia should be legally recognized as a strong hate crime.**

The Parliamentary Assembly noted that Islamic radicalism and manipulation of religious beliefs for political reasons oppose human rights and democratic values. At the same time, in many Council of Europe member states, Muslims feel socially excluded, stigmatised and discriminated against; they become victims of stereotypes, social marginalisation and political extremism. The Assembly is deeply concerned about Islamic extremism as well as about extremism against Muslim communities in Europe. Both phenomena reinforce each other.

What is really needed is to de-legitimize “anti-Islam” politics and stigmatize it as just as taboo as anti-Semitism and racism. Alongside anti-Semitism, anti-Black racism and homophobia, islamophobia legally should be recognised as a hate crime to be punished if necessary.

Governments need to be able to identify who the targets of racially or religiously aggravated offences through disaggregated data collection are if they are to form effective policies to address these phenomena.

- Take all necessary measures in order to prevent racial/religious profiling and other forms of institutionalized racism and Islamophobia;
- Conduct public awareness campaigns and specific programmes for governmental officials and also for citizens in order to combat Islamophobia;
- Encourage and support intergovernmental human rights agencies and non-governmental organizations dealing with Islamophobia;

Muslims should actively take part in joint efforts to combat against Islamophobic hate crimes, especially at international level. Therefore I would like to finish by a humble word of advice to Muslim fellows: **be not just victims but also actors in your destiny.**

Thank you