

For a cohesive society: Countering Islamic extremism

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Open, tolerant societies and the separation of church and state have been important achievements of European history and Western civilization. They are the result of our Judeo-Christian heritage and of the Enlightenment, cultivating cohesion, mutual understanding and critical thinking. These achievements are key to the success of Western civilization.

The European Union is built on fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and the respect for fundamental rights. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union includes the freedoms of speech and religion, as well as the right to equality.

These values and fundamental rights constitute the foundation of our societies, and they are valid for everyone, regardless of origin, religion or gender. Openness and tolerance towards other cultures have enriched our cultures in the past and will also be beneficial for our societies in the future. The EPP wants our societies to be welcoming and to give a sense of belonging to everyone. We must, however, define our values — the results of centuries-long struggles which have made Europe what it is today — as a common basis and precondition for everyone wanting to be part of our community. In many European countries, Muslims form an integral part of our societies; and most of Europe's Muslims are well integrated.

We must, however, push more vigorously against the increasing trend towards parallel societies and self-segregation fuelled by the spreading of 'Islamism' within parts of Muslim communities in Europe. Islamism is a theocratic ideology that aims to dominate society as a whole, an ideology in which law must conform to Islamic sharia. Islamism, therefore, is not primarily about spirituality: in the first place, it is about law, and thus stands in stark contrast with our commitment to the separation of church and state in our societies. Islamism is often promoted and financed by the Gulf States, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar; these efforts often have a clearly political aim and risk further alienating Muslims and non-Muslims alike and promoting division and intolerance. Also, the influence of Turkey on its European diaspora, via its Ministry for Religious Affairs (Diyanet), is becoming increasingly worrisome.

The spreading of hatred towards non-Muslims as well as misogyny and a rejection of the equality of every human person and of democracy are features of Salafist and Wahhabist currents of Islam. These currents are not only incompatible with the constitutional order of our countries: they also provide an ideological basis for jihadist terrorism. Therefore, these ideologies must be combatted more vigorously. They not only undermine peace, human rights and development in the Middle East but also endanger the peace and peaceful integration processes within our own societies. We should instead empower a rational Islam, which emphasises free will and human reason, both in Europe and in the world, and which is in line with the values of universal human rights and liberal democracy.

The freedom of religion is an important European value and must be protected for all religions. This principle, however, must not be allowed to override other basic values on which our societies are also founded. Freedom of religion ends when it collides with other basic principles, namely the laws of our societies and the security of individuals residing in our countries.

Our education systems need to focus more on teaching European values such as tolerance, freedom of religion, separation of church and state and equality between men and women. Experience shows that integration as such should go beyond mere participation in the

community or merely mastering the language of one's host country: integration is most effective when newcomers respect and embrace our values, rights and duties. We must do our utmost to give everyone the chance to fully participate in our societies, working with programmes aimed at integrating new arrivals into our labour markets and educational systems and paying special attention to the participation of women. By recognising the role of women in integration, we also gain stronger advocates in favour of this process.

The integration of immigrants has become a political priority that must be pursued not only across different policy areas but also at different competence levels (EU, national, regional and local) and by involving, and giving responsibility to, non-governmental stakeholders, such as civil society organisations — including those working with, and originating from, diaspora and immigrant communities which clearly embrace our values, laws and principles.

The EPP calls for:

- More effective international and European action in fighting ISIS/Daesh and other jihadi-salafi groups in Syria, Libya and Iraq so that Islamist ideologies lose their 'home base' and jihadist training camps;
- Combatting all religious ideologies incompatible with our Western values, including the Salafist or Wahhabist ideologies at the heart of ISIS/Daesh action; this should be done in cooperation with countries and institutions of the Southern Mediterranean;
- A strengthening of European policy against terrorism and radicalism and for encouraging the cooperation of Member States in this area;
- Member States to provide priority protection for vulnerable groups in refugee camps and reception centres;
- Stronger control of Schengen's external borders by improving access to existing data bases, as well as by increasing and enhancing the human resources and technical equipment currently available at the borders, to ensure effective controls (including for arms) while ensuring free movement inside the EU;
- Improvement in the collaboration and exchange of information between Europol and the security and intelligence services of all Member States, as well as the strengthening of Europol's technical and human resources, to enable effective monitoring policies (especially concerning returnees);
- Stepped-up cooperation between EU Member States and the Radicalisation Awareness Network's Centre of Excellence: for example, by exchanging data on returning foreign fighters in order to prevent and counter radicalisation at the community level;
- A reconsideration of EU policy vis-à-vis countries that finance Islamic terrorism;
- The supervision, by the authorities of EU Member States, of funding by foreign entities for mosques and Islamic associations, and for the prohibition of these funds whenever there are grounds for believing such funding could contribute to radicalism, extremism, violence or even terrorism in our countries; instead, we call for promoting a rational Islam, in Europe and in the world, which emphasises free will and human reason and which is in line with the values of universal human rights and liberal democracy;
- The prohibition of all attempts to install parallel judicial systems (i.e. 'sharia councils'), as these disregard the equality principle and other basic principles enshrined in our constitutions;
- A ban on full-face veils (i.e. the burqa or niqab) in public places, both for reasons of security and because seeing one another's faces is an integral part of human interaction in Europe;
- The avoidance of concentrating thousands of third-country nationals in any one location

- as this makes integration and absorption by mainstream European society more difficult;
- Empowering and encouraging the EU's Muslim citizens to promote a rational Islam which is tolerant, critical and peaceful, and in line with the values of our societies and the laws of our countries;
- The legal bases and provisions of Islam to be regarded by the state in the same way as those of other religions;
- The promotion of universal values as outlined in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, especially in the context of the education system (e.g. through ethics education);
- A strengthening of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in order to encourage dialogue and debate, as well as to overcome tensions and to build strong projects together;
- Reinforcement of interfaith initiatives to encourage religious communities to interact in an open, constructive and peaceful way;
- Better coordination at EU level between all levels of government in the design, implementation and dissemination of best integration practices;
- Correlation between social security benefits granted by Member States to newly arrived third-country individuals and the fulfilment of mandatory integration requirements;
- The introduction and extension of Islamic studies in EU Member States; it is vital to educate school teachers and imams in Europe to ensure that lessons and sermons remain in line with the values of open, tolerant societies, promoting a spirit of citizenship in EU Member States based upon an inclusive and open patriotism;
- The European Commission and Member States to make available for civil society, including women's and human rights organisations, funding and other resources which provide assistance, promote inclusion and develop awareness-raising programmes for human rights and gender-related issues;
- Outreach efforts in order to increase trust in the authorities among Muslim communities;
- Combatting discrimination, especially in the labour market; we call, on the one hand, for creating jobs and opportunities — especially for immigrant communities and persons of foreign origin, which suffer from much higher-than-average unemployment rates — and, on the other, for creating incentives to seek employment by linking allowances to work;
- Reinforcing prevention work in vulnerable neighbourhoods through social work and community policing, but also by promoting sports associations and providing activities for youth;
- A special focus on the integration of women from immigrant backgrounds, both through education addressed to women as well as to men and through employment programmes;
- Member States to support fast-track insertion into the labour market of newly arrived migrants by means of early skills and qualifications assessment — combined with language training — the teaching of entrepreneurship and other required skills, as well as specific counselling;
- The skilful use of EU funding instruments to ensure that the integration of refugees into the labour market leads to success;
- Measures to combat and prevent radicalisation in schools and universities;
- Programmes to combat and prevent radicalisation in prisons;
- Programmes to combat and prevent radicalisation on the Internet and via social media, including a counter-narrative strategy;
- Agreement on a common European definition of 'illegal content' on the Internet, encouraging all Member States to establish Internet monitoring units at the national

level under the coordination of Europol and, in the long term, to support the creation within Europol of a European cell responsible for the removal of illegal Internet content, while respecting and promoting the right to freedom of expression;

- School curricula which foster a stronger sense of belonging to our societies and cultural identities;
- The compulsory participation of all students in school activities, including sports and swim classes, and the strict avoidance of exemptions on religious grounds: curricula should be for everyone, regardless of origin or belief; by means of rapport-building activities, such as mandatory school trips and ethics education, a better integration of youth into local communities can be achieved;
- The creation of a sound evaluation mechanism in order to monitor and measure the effectiveness of integration policies thus far applied.

**If you have any question
you would like to ask
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