



## INTEGRATION OF MUSLIMS IN EUROPE AND GÜLEN MOVEMENT

ARAXS PASHAYAN<sup>389</sup>

### Abstract

In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mankind faces a few tendencies, first of all, related to the resurgence of radical trends in major religions, the increasing role of religion in the universal civilization, and cultural, ideological and religious diversity on global and local levels. In particular, the troubled integration of Muslims into European societies is evidence of perceptible incompatibility of Christian and Islamic traditions. There are two main tendencies within the Muslim communities of Europe. The first one is related to radicalization processes. Gülen mentions four reasons why Muslims often have problems with dialogue; he says that many Muslims even educated believe that West seeks to undermine Islam. The second tendency is related to a newly established identity. There are circles tending to retain their Muslim identity, and as a distinctive feature they choose religious identity, which is more determining and powerful element in the competition with the European/Christian civilization. Finally, this paper is argued, that it is not Christian and Islamic civilizations that clash in Europe but post-Christian secular/liberal values and Muslim traditional values. In this case, the only alternative for sectarianism, isolation and radical relativism is interfaith and intercultural dialogue. To oppose and resent the West, as Islamic scholar and peace activist Fethullah Gülen argues, will never benefit Islam or Muslims. He indicates the method of dialogue: forgetting the arguments of the past and concentrating on common points. He stresses the tolerance as an extremely important virtue that should always be promoted. Gülen argues that Christianity and Judaism have in common with Islam. He insists that the world is becoming more global and both sides feel the need for a give-and-take relationship. Gülen movement aims to promote creative and positive relations between the West and the Muslims.

### 1. Introduction

In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mankind faces a few complementary tendencies, first of all, related to the resurgence of radical trends in major religions, the increasing role of religion in the universal civilization, and cultural, ideological and religious diversity on global and local levels. In particular, the troubled integration of Muslims into European societies is evidence of perceptible incompatibility of Christian and Islamic traditions.

In spite of these tendencies, Islamic scholar and peace activist Fethullah Gülen argues that Christianity has in common with Islam, since both religions consider they have missions. Gülen insists that the world is becoming more global and both sides feel the need for a give-and-take

<sup>389</sup> Assistant Professor in Yerevan State University, teaching a course on modern Islamic movements in Arab countries; an expert on Middle East in Noravank Foundation, Yerevan; senior researcher on Arab countries at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Armenia. Dr Pashayan specializes in political Islam, having done her doctorate on the 'Organization of the Islamic Conference 1969–2002'. She is the author of several learned articles and the monograph, *Organization of the Islamic Conference: The Objectives, Activity, Position Towards the Karabakh Conflict* (Yerevan, 2003).



relationship. Gülen movement aims to promote creative and positive relations between the West and the Muslims.

Since the events of 9/11 a great deal has been written on the growing religious fundamentalism and violence among Europe's Muslim population. Migration has recently been framed as a source of fear and instability for the nation-states in the West, though it was rather a source of content in the 1960s.

## 2. The Gülen Movement: Theory and Practice

The Gülen movement is one of interesting examples of liberal Islamic thinking in the Middle East. The movement has Islamic, nationalist, liberal, and modern characteristics. Its ability is to reconcile traditional Islamic values with modernity. Beginning in the 1960's, Gülen Movement emerged as a social force. In 1990's political and economic developments in Turkey, global changes after the end of cold war and increased Turkish migration to Europe contributed to the transformation of the Gülen movement "from a modest community of Nursi followers to an international civil/cosmopolitan Muslim social movement" active in nearly 70 countries. (1) The movement is influenced by the moderate concept of "Turkish Islam" formulated by some nationalist thinkers, and also the *Nurcu* or *Nur* (Light) movement that developed around the ideology of Said Nursi (1877-1961), a prominent religious authority who rejects the idea of clash between the "East" and "West".(2)

The founder of the movement - Fethullah Gülen and his devotees accept Western civilization as a suitable foundation for material life while considering Islamic civilization suitable for spiritual life. Thomas Michel, who recognizes Gülen's movement importance, argues that Gülen is more famous as an activist in public communication.(3)

Part of the Turkish secularist elite views Gülen as a progressive development, argue that the solution to Turkey's problems depends on reaching a consensus. Though others see him as a threat as of using different tactics to reach the same goal as the Islamists. The Islamists think that the secular establishment uses Gülen's community to obstruct their ideology. Greg Barton argues that Gülen movement is often mistaken for either an Islamist movement or a Sufi *tarekat*, but closer examination reveals that it is in fact something very different, it is well developed and broad influential Islamic social movement. (4) Gülen movement illustrates an ability to unify "Turkish-Islamic synthesis", a strong identity uniting Turkish-ness (or Kemalism) with Muslim-ness into one position.(5)

Fethullah Gülen does not favor the state applying Islamic law. He accepts Said Nursi's argument that the idea of republicanism is very much in accord with the idea of "consultation" discussed in Islamic sources. Gülen's goals are simultaneously to Islamize the Turkish nationalist ideology and to Turkify Islam. He proposes two keys to provide peace in society - tolerance and dialogue. He argues that religion is a private matter, and its requirements should not be imposed on anyone concluding that the democratic form of government is the best choice. Such an approach, he insists, would strengthen the state, and thus protect society by widening the state's base of legitimacy and enhancing its ability to mobilize the population.(6)

In fact, in a democratic society the source of law is colorblind and free from ethnic prejudice. It promotes the creation of an environment for the development of human rights, political participation, protection of minority rights, and the participation of individuals and society in decision-making institutions which are supposed to be the characteristics of our modern world. Everybody should be allowed to express themselves with the condition that no pressure should be made on others through



variety of means. Also, members of minority communities should be allowed to live according to their beliefs. If these sorts of legislations are made within the norms of international law and international agreements, Islam will have no objection to any of these. No one can ignore the universal values that the Qur'an and the Sunnah have presented with regard to the rights mentioned above. Therefore, it is impossible to prove in any way that Islam opposes democracy. (7)

About the reconciliation of Islam with democracy Gülen has his own approach:

Those who follow a more moderate pattern also believe that it would be much better to introduce Islam as a complement to democracy instead of presenting it as an ideology. Such an introduction of Islam may play an important role in the Muslim world through enriching local forms of democracy and extending it in such a way that helps humans develop an understanding of the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds. I believe that Islam also would enrich democracy in answering the deep needs of humans, such as spiritual satisfaction, which cannot be fulfilled except through the remembrance of the Eternal One. (8)

Gülen movement has been manifested in many groups and educational institutions. There are nearly 700 schools worldwide inspired by Gülen movement advocating for global toleration, dialogue, and peace. To promote their views, Gülen's followers have set up a wide range of organizations. One of them is the Turkish Teachers' Foundation publishes a monthly journal, *Sizinti* ("Disclosures") and two academic journals "Yeni Umit" ("New Hope") and the "Fountain". It also organizes national and international symposiums, panel discussions, and conferences. Another foundation, the Turkish Writers and Journalists Foundation, brings secularist and Islamist intellectuals together. The foundation has organized national and international conferences on the attributes and benefits of interfaith dialogue. Followers of Gülen manage a media network and are active in the construction of clinics, research institutes, and cultural foundation around the world. Much of this kind of institutions success is due to the Gülen movement policy of working in accordance with its host country's national laws regarding education, religion, and social organizing.

Fethullah Gülen is one of the contemporary Muslim thinkers advocating interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Pim Valkenberg, speaking about Gülen's contribution to Muslim-Christian dialogue, argues that the most interesting thing about Gülen's writings is not his originality, "but the way in which he combines the wisdom of mystical and exegetical traditions of Islam with references to Western philosophers and theologians".(9) Gülen writings about dialogue have been collected in *Advocate of Dialogue*. Gülen mentions four reasons why Muslims have problems with dialogue. The first three reasons are connected with the historical reminiscence of Muslim world about the western colonialism, so the Muslims suspicious about the dialogue using from the West as a political matter. The fourth reason is theological and connected with the distorted image of Islam. (10) These reasons are well described by Edward Said in his "Orientalism" as well.(11) Mentioning the difficulties, Gülen is coming to the nodal point of his message: "Interfaith dialogue in a must today, and the first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones". (12)

Gülen considers that the dialogue is not only required by modernity but also by Qur'an urges Muslims to respect the followers of other religions, former Prophets and their Books:

When dealing with People of the Book who are not oppressors, we have no right to behave violently against them or to think about how to destroy them. Such behavior is non-Islamic, contrary to Islamic rules and principles, and it can even be said that it is anti-Islamic. (13)



The Movement of Fethullah Gülen emerged as Turkey's brand of Islamic modernity that seeks to realize peace through education, tolerance and interfaith dialogue. (14)

Gülen argues that 'dialogue meetings' primarily concerning with religion. Basic Islamic sources advise Muslims to engage in dialogue with other faiths. Gülen reaffirm that the dialogue is not his invention or innovation, but a revival of the most neglected aspect of Islam. Tolerance is also central to the Gülen movement's conception of reality:

Among the many things we have lost, perhaps the first and most important is tolerance. From this world we understand embracing people regardless of difference of opinion, worldview, ideology, ethnicity, or belief. It also means putting up with matters we do not like by finding strength in a deep conscience, faith and a generous heart or by strength of our emotions. (15)

Contradicting S. Huntington's assertion that "Muslim have problems living at peace with their neighbors, Gülen defines the movement's project as follows:

In a world becoming more and more globalized, we are trying to get to know those who will be our future neighbor...one of the most important factors here is to eliminate factors that separate people...such as discrimination base on color, race, belief, and ethnicity..." (16)

In our modern day the relationship between Islam and terrorism is greatly debated and Gülen approach to this issue is very interesting. Gülen emphasizes that terror harms to Islam, Muslims and humanity at large. The scholar tries to show that Muslims responsible for terror attacks may first change the image of Islam in their mind. They have no comprehensive understanding of the sources, they read the texts out of context, they misinterpret their religion and then put this misunderstood religion into practice, they are misguided and misguide others.(17)

I regret to say that in the countries Muslims live, some religious leaders and immature Muslims have no other weapon on hand than their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam; they use this to engage people in struggles that serve their own purposes. In fact, Islam is a true faith, and it should be lived truly. On the way to attaining faith one can never use untrue methods...No person should kill another human being. No one can touch an innocent person, even in time of war. No one can give a fatwa (a legal pronouncement) commending this matter. No one should be a suicide bomber. No one can rush into crowds with bombs tied to his or her body. Regardless of the religion of these crowds, this is not religiously permissible. (18)

Gülen speaks about the problem of overcoming the global calamity of terror. In contrast to many observers, Gülen thinks that the world situation is not detraining and there will be no clash of civilization. According to Gülen, those who are looking forward to a catastrophic future for the world hope that global antagonism will ensure the continuation of their power in the world. Gülen emphasizes that education must play a very important role in helping to resolve the world's problems.(19)

"...Gülen not only is renewing Muslim discourses and practices but also transforming the public sphere without claiming or boasting that he is doing so".(20)



### 3. Turkish Community in Germany and Islamic Identity

The Turkish immigrant group is one of the largest Muslim communities that has settled in Europe from the beginning of the 20th century. There are more than 4.5 million Euro-Turks dwelling in the European Union countries /Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium/. As of 2006, according to U.S. Department of State, there are 3.2 million Muslims (roughly 4% of the population) in Germany. Most Muslims live in Berlin and the larger cities of former West Germany. However, unlike in most other European countries, sizeable Muslim communities exist in some rural regions of Germany, especially Baden-Wurttemberg, Hestia and parts of Bavaria and North-Rhine Westphalia. Most Muslims in Germany are Sunnis. Many Turkish Muslims are Alevi. The Turks have formed their own special society within the Western societies, a feature, which distinguishes them from the other immigrant communities. The Turks always adhere to their national identity and leave impressions on native residents wherever they settle. The central element of their social life is the mosque also comprises a café, a barbershop, food shops, a library, and a lodge for wayfarers. Furthermore, many mosques have recently been equipped with modern means of communication like the Internet and telecommunication lines. Especially women tend to stick to their distinctive outer appearance. Turkish woman ties hijab in specific way.

The merchants are always keen on displaying Turkish goods. The shops have names like Istanbul, Ankara, Amra, Mulana, Turkeya, and display the same quantity and types of goods supplied in Turkey. No immigrant Turkish home lacks satellite dishes configured to receive homeland Turkish channels. Beside TV channels, Turkish daily papers are delivered to most immigrant Turkish doorsteps whether for free or on subscription. Most of these papers (*Zaman*, *Turkiye*, *Hurriyet*, etc) are distributed all over Europe. Other periodicals include European-language magazines and papers specialized in Turkish affairs and the Turkish immigrant community, which attract only a small number of Turkish readers.

Charitable works are always observed by the Turkish residents. There are thousands of mosques that have been built with the donations of the Turkish immigrant community. They are also noted for seizing the opportunity to buy churches on sale and then transforming them into mosques. They try to support Arab Muslim issues as well. The charity makes them feel they belong to the Muslim Ummah. (21)

Islam is a visible religion in Germany and is the largest minority religion in the country. The history of Islam in Germany started at the end of the 1960s. The Turkish migrants remained invisible in their religious practices also because they did not regard Germany as a new home. Their intention was to work only for a short period of time in Germany, and they were emotionally much more connected to the political debate and public life in Turkey. They strongly believed that, they would certainly return to Turkey. The first generation of migrants understood their practicing of their religion as a homecoming. They practiced it in their homes or intimate, invisible places shielded from the outside, because the outside was conceived of as foreign, as a foreign land, or - in Turkish - "*gurbet*." The reality of migrants' live - homesickness and ignorance – even are characteristic of the so-called "*Gastarbeiter*"-Turkish literature until the beginning of the 1980s.

When Turks in Germany had turned from migrant workers into immigrants in the second generation, however, it was not only their institutional disposition, which became transformed, but also their individual religious ones. For the first immigrants, the so-called Turkish 'People's Islam' was a



formative influence for their practice of religion in Germany. The People's Islam was oriented towards and shaped by the practicalities of everyday life and was defined by distinct phases of an individual's life. (22) The People's Islam was embedded into the culture at large, while in the Diaspora, religion later became 'de-culturalized.' The migrants slowly began to study the Qur'an in Turkish, which was a radical change to their religious lives. Young Muslims in Germany often declare that they "have discovered Islam for themselves." The notion of "self-actualization" through Islam is particularly highlighted by Sigrid Nökel in her study *Die Töchter der Gastarbeiter und der Islam*. As Nökel says, personal growth is central to self-descriptions of phases in young Islamic women's lives. The decision to wear a head-scarf and to model their lives individually, and out of their own free will, according to Islamic principles becomes young women's means towards self-actualization and dominates their relation to Islam. (23)

When second-generation migrants left from the idea to return to their parents' home country, this not only changed their status as 'guest' to a status as immigrants, but also helped to shift the power balance between immigrants and Germany. Germany has been forced to meet the immigrant on eye-level, consider him a new citizen, and communicate with him in discussion about integration. In contrast to the first generation, which practiced Islam defensively and invisibly, the second generation uses Islam as an instrument to give meaning to their everyday, individual lives. It has become a highly visible and irreversible part of German society. The second generation do not only study the Islamic sources to find solutions to their everyday problems in Western society, but tries to counter Western discourses about Islam.(24)

Applying Islam became a source of overcoming personal destruction, isolation and nihilism. The Islamic identity helped to see the future. The religious factor allowed young people to find their orientations in German society.(25)

Until 2001, migrants in Germany had not been perceived in religious terms, but in ethnic ones. Polls in the 1990s, for instance, indicated that about three million people with a Turkish background live in Germany. Within a couple of years, their identity changed - the majority society began to perceive them differently. Now they are no longer perceived in ethnic terms, but in religious ones: three million Turks became three million Muslims - although they never had the chance to make a statement about their religion on their own. While German Protestants and Catholics have the chance to tell the public authorities whether they belong to the Catholic or to the Protestant church, Muslims have no chance to tell whether they want to be registered as Muslims. The reason is that Islam has no organization that is comparable to the Christian churches. There are some Muslim organizations, but the majority of migrants from Turkey do not belong to them. (26)

#### **4. Turkish integration in Germany and Gülen Movement**

The discussions about the Euro-Turks have been heated in a time when Turkey has been given a full-membership perspective to the European Union. These discussions have also become imbedded in the debates on 9/11, the killing of anti-Islamist political leader Pim Fortuyn and film director Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands, the cartoon crisis in Denmark, and the Pope's discussion about the Prophet Mohammad. In the meantime, Euro-Muslims in general, and Euro-Turks in particular, have had a greater visibility in the European public sphere in a way that has fueled Islamophobic sentiments.(27)



The relationship between Germany's largely Turkish Muslim population and the German national community was until recently conditioned by the political class's refusal to acknowledge that the "guestworkers" were there to stay. Since 2000, however, German outlook and policy have changed; the reality of immigration and permanent settlement is now recognised and a new willingness, in principle, to extend citizenship has developed. However, the view that integration should precede naturalisation – the requirement that Turks and other Muslims should first integrate and demonstrate their "German-ness" before they may acquire that citizenship – remains a formidable brake on the process. It is unrealistic to expect those of Turkish origin to become fully integrated into German society while citizenship and full participation in public life are withheld.(28)

The German government has spent the past years working with immigrant groups and independent experts on a national integration plan. An estimated 15 million people in Germany have an immigrant background, and Chancellor Angela Merkel's "grand coalition" of Social Democrats and Christian conservatives sees integration as crucial to the country's future security and economic well-being. Discussions over the past years have shown that Germany has a long way to go before immigrants feel included in society. For decades, politicians have insisted that Germany is not an immigration country, but Merkel's focus on integration points to an important shift in German politics.

Whether Germany will remain and become an even more civil multi-ethnic society will depend on a number of factors. First, some of the most severe social problems have to be tackled and educational system has to be improved. Germany needs a lot of effort to enable underprivileged - German and non-German - young people to have a decent future, materially as well as emotionally. Even the outcasts, even right-wing extremists, have the right to get emotional support and help. This has nothing to do with approving their actions. On the contrary: only if a society stands firmly against violence, only if there is an obvious will to protect the weaker and to care for the victims, can a civil society survive in the long run.(29)

There are social, economic and political barriers to integration presented by the host societies and there are many efforts among Muslim population to promote their own visions and models for integration. Among these models is the Gülen movement, which is has embraced "a modern, multicultural notion of political identity and community that is also deeply rooted in Muslim practice and traditions".(30)

The debate over Turkish-Muslim integration in Germany has resolved around three main educational policy issues. The first involves the religious instruction in the schools. The second educational policy debate involves the establishment of private Muslim or Turkish schools. The third educational policy issue involves wearing of headscarves in the schools. In contrast of France, German schools permit female students to wear headscarves in the classroom. The issue of headscarves has been in particular area of concern all over Europe, and in Germany as well. While under the German Basic Law's freedom of religious expression clause, German students may wear headscarves in the classroom, the situation concerning teachers has been much more complex. Since teachers are representatives of the state, they have no permission wear a headscarf. Gülen movement's approach to the issue is interesting. The movement prefers to avoid direct controversy and eschews a highly visible role in the current struggle over permitting teachers to wear the headscarf in the classroom. Jill Irvine argues that such a stance is in keeping with the general goal of the movement in Germany to avoid highly charged political battles that could detract from its educational mission.(31)



Gülen movement participants in Germany have founded a variety of educational institutions that operates through the country.(32) In the past decade though the difficulties, the movement in Germany has been building an educational infrastructure that aims to improve social situation of Turkish residents and promote their integration into German society. They attempted to find “middle way” between the cultural devastation implied by assimilation and the “globalization” of a minority group living apart from the majority culture. Any solution to the challenges of integration must involve the give and takes of cultural understanding and mutual enrichment. Turkish residents must become educated according standards and fully capable of operating at the highest levels on German professional society, but the key to integration is to provide the best possible education. (33)

## **5. Conclusion**

Muslim communities /Turkish communities particularly/ are not adequately perceived by European societies founded on tolerance which has generated two tendencies within the communities. The first one is related to radicalization processes within the communities. The emigrants who encounter various social problems, especially, unemployment, are subjected to discrimination which leads to their isolation. Suffering from psychological discomfort, they gradually become an alien element for the European society, they feel themselves as strangers. This fact leads to the increased consolidation with one's own ethnic group. The resultant ideological gap is bridged by Islam which functions as a uniting factor.

The second tendency is related to a newly established identity. There is new generation which rejects isolation, tries to overcome stereotypes and is ready to integrate into the European societies. These are the circles which obtained European education, speak in the language of the given country and are well aware of the local culture. At the same time, they tend to retain their Muslim (or national) identity, and as a distinctive feature they choose religious identity, which is more determining and powerful element in the competition with the European/Christian civilization.

The requirement of the institutional presence of Islam in European countries creates an immediate contradiction with the fundamental values of the European societies. Europe is not willing to reject the liberal cultural and moral values, which constitute the basis for the Western civilization, even realizing that pluralistic multicultural community needs universal values. Europe which face demographic and socio-moral problems in some cases feels threatened by the manifestations of Islamic fanaticism.

It is not Christian and Islamic civilizations that clash in Europe but post-Christian secular/liberal values and Muslim traditional values. In this case, the only alternative for sectarianism, isolation and radical relativism is interfaith and intercultural dialogue. To oppose and resent the West, as Gülen argues, will never benefit Islam or Muslims. He indicates the method of dialogue: forgetting the arguments of the past and concentrating on common points. He stresses the tolerance as an extremely important virtue that should always be promoted.