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Issues of Ethnical and Confessional Relations and their solutions in the Islamic journalism in Western Europe

Abstract: This article presents and summarizes the different views and approaches of scholars and journalists of Muslim and European origin to the dissolving a set of complex issues of Ethnical and Confessional Relations in Western Europe. The main problems are identity, governmental dialogue with Diasporas, adaptation of Muslims in the European Community. The authors suggest the systematic approach to the solutions of these difficult problems.

Key words: Arab journalism, Muslim journalism, diasporas, Migration policy, Europe, Middle East, Muslim organization, Islam.

Today Islam is firmly settled in the Old World and it is a very significant factor that influences almost all socio-political processes in the countries of Western Europe. Therefore, without taking into account this factor, it is impossible to make any serious future forecast not only of Europe, but the whole world. This presentation is an attempt to assess the current status and prospects of further development of Islam and ethno-confessional relations in Western Europe based on an analysis of several works of Western Muslim writers and scholars, published during last 10 years in European Arab press (“al-Hayat”, “ash-Sharq al-Awsat” etc.) and Arabic scholar journal “at-Tasamoh”. Besides that, the views of European scholars, who study the ethno-confessional conflicts, were also considered.

In 2010-2011 the heads of major Western European countries (Germany, the UK and France) officially have declared about the collapse of the policy of multiculturalism, which was proposed in the second half of the twentieth century as an alternative to American politics “melting pot”.

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Migration policy of the European states has always been the focus of the entire Western European Arab press. Thus, the newspaper “as-Sharq al-Awsat” in the issue of 11 November 2005 abruptly criticizes the policy of the French government towards Muslim immigrants (the article of A. Tahery “France and the fruits of multiculturalism”). The publications like this are numerous, and the mere enumeration of them would take too much time. However, the researcher interests only in those publications that contain besides criticism constructive suggestions, aimed to improving the government's measures related to Muslim communities.

The main problem for European Muslims is the issue of identity, as Arab journalists and their European colleagues stress. In European countries, the socialization of the Muslims, especially the youth, proceeds, in fact, in extreme conditions: they must simultaneously adapt to the environmental parameters of the environment – a highly developed European country – and still maintain a relationship with the culture of their own ethnic group and religion, with which some of them have a weak connection over time, while others, on the contrary, have an increased connection. The latter, unfortunately, most, since the reaction of the host society leads to the fact that Muslim youth refuses European identity in favor of a Muslim.

However, the issue of identity is the key problem not only to Muslims in Western Europe. Even the citizens of the European Union have difficulties in this matter, which would seem quite a lot of common characteristics, what to say about Muslims. The process of “formation at EU residents feeling “double” identity that combines both a sense of belonging and to his country and to Europe as a whole” yet fails [Veinstein, 2009, p. 124].

The next vary important problem is the lack of effective mechanisms for cooperation of government agencies with Muslim diasporas. As B. Lewis rightly pointed out not so long ago, “Muslims have a number of distinct advantages. They have a zeal and strength of conviction, that in most Western countries are either weak or absent. They are dedicated and disciplined” [Lewis, 2007]. But the Europeans, continued American scientist, has its advantages, chief among which are knowledge and freedom [Lewis, 2007].

Today, organizations of Muslims in Europe are represented by mosques, schools and other educational institutions, news agencies, broadcasting corporations, various unions and associations. Speaking of Muslim organizations in Western Europe, it is necessary to point out that almost all of them, with varying degrees of religious orientation, are non-political. It seems that nonpolitical public organizations created by Muslims,

will eventually become an integral part of the civil society of the countries of Western Europe, of course, it depends on both sides, on their willingness and readiness to move towards each other.

Currently in France, for example, there are approximately 1,600 Muslim mosques and associations representing various points of view and trends. One of the measures on the “domestication” of Islam, taken by the Government, was the establishment in 2002-03 years French Council for Muslim cult (Conseil français du culte musulman – CFCM).

This organization was to represent Islam at the state level, but there were not represented the interests of all the Muslims of France. Today, the organization discusses with officials the processes of construction of mosques, Muslim holidays etc. It is interesting, but neither the government, nor the Muslims themselves do not consider this organization as a bridge for the integration of Muslims into French society, as the Council has not submitted all of Islam in France.

There are similar Muslim councils in every region of the country. Currently in France Union of Muslim Organizations of France also operates. It designed to defend the common interests of the Muslim community at the state level. France has also accumulated rich experience in combating terrorism, especially in the 60s of last century, when the conflict with Algeria reached the highest point of development.

According to opinions of many researchers, measures for the integration of Muslims into German society made by the Government of Germany for the last 10 years, seem very effective [Muslims in Europe, 2009]. First of all, it is the new immigration law enacted in January 2005 that allows to adjust the immigration of Muslims in Germany.

In accordance with a number of laws adopted in November 2001 and later against terrorism, the German authorities are no longer prohibited to keep track of what is happening inside mosques. Some German states have passed laws requiring imams to lead the service in the mosques in the German language, others wanted to control the educational programs in which trained imams. Formal relations between Muslim and other religious organizations harmonious enough, especially with Christian.

At least all public schools in Germany contain in its educational standard religious teachings. Now Introduction course of Islamic studies in the educational standard of public schools is actively discussed at the level of the land, because the German system of federalism relates this aspect of education to the competence of the federation. In some lands

Islamic Studies are included in the course of comparative religion, in other lands the government assists in the establishment of private Muslim schools.

Thus, Germany has made the most significant (in comparison with other European countries) step forward to overcome the alienation of Muslims from the rest of society. The progress in overcoming alienation would have been even more successful if not for unemployment.

Special problem, according to researchers and experts, is some imams – abbots of mosques. Hundreds of mosques are led by imams, whose training and political views are unknown. These circumstances complicate monitoring of Muslim communities by the European governments. So, in May 2004, Interior Minister of Spain Jose Antonio Alonso announced the government's decision to regulate the activities of imams. The subject of considerable debate is also a religious education, the content of programs of academic disciplines in particular.

One of the effective tools of influence upon European Muslims are media of the Arab East in European languages. For example, in 1975 Saudi Arabia established the first daily political newspaper in English “Arab News”, which “destroyed the cultural barriers, uniting Arabs and non-Arabs” [Arab News].

So, it is possible to draw some general conclusions. The situation in all European countries is similar in general, the range of problems basically the same: identity, governmental dialogue with Diasporas, adaptation of Muslims in the European Community. In spite of the fact that some Muslims have succeeded in Europe, the vast majority of them have low levels of education, in addition, they are poor and, as a rule, do not have jobs and livelihoods. Moreover, the forced segregation makes Muslims live in ghettos where poverty and crime is extremely high. Muslim ghettos are a major source of danger for Europeans.

How is it possible to overcome the existing problems in ethno-religious relations? The analysis of the papers of publicists and scholars done in this study allows us to formulate an answer to this difficult question. It is necessary to solve this complex set of issues systematically. Only mutual learning will lead to understanding, therefore the priority actions are to take place in education: schools and universities everywhere should introduce the general course of religious studies in which should be a section for Islamic Studies and Muslim culture.

The popularization of Oriental studies will help Europeans to introduce with the peoples of the East and their culture. Growth of the

Muslim population, says Dutch scientist J. Waardenburg [Waardenburg, 2007, p. 125], puts the need to introduce courses of Islamic studies at European universities. Muslim immigrants also need in organizing of the special courses of language and culture of the country where they live, just as it is done in Germany. A system of measures aimed to the education of Muslim youth, women's emancipation (thereby fall fertility in Muslim families) is required. In order to work together Europeans should to involve Muslim scholars in collaboration, to promote their achievements and to create a Muslim intelligentsia [Klausen, 2005, p. 187]. The ideas like this, are in the journalistic articles of famous German writer and journalist of Turkish origin Zafer Senocak (born in 1961, Ankara; lives in German from 1970) and Danish writer, playwright and journalist of Moroccan origin Abdelkadir Benali (born in 1975, Maroc; lives in Denmark from 1979) [Senocak and Benali, 2006]. The memories of these writers have a strong impact on the reader because they are based on personal recollections of authors: both writers were in Europe in childhood and their own experience demonstrated difficulties in adapting to the European community.

However, the most difficult knot of problems lies in the economic sphere, and all the journalists and academics emphasize that. If all Muslims are given work, the majority of the problems will disappear naturally. State powers of the European countries should develop economic employment programs: for their implementation certainly the refresher courses and advanced training, skills training etc. are required. The best measure combining the different people is a collaboration, and then you probably may not need any governmental measures to integrate Muslims into European society, not have to "invent" a particular ideology called "Euro-Islam" and finally to confuse already restless European Muslims. In this case, the integration of Muslims in European society will occur naturally. Communicating with colleagues during the work, Muslims will know quickly the European languages, learn a lot about the European culture and meet the Europeans with their own. Live communication will be much more useful than any theoretical courses in the schools and universities.

The important role in harmonizing the ethno-confessional relations should play European and Middle Eastern media, since they have vast capabilities. In an environment where Islamophobia reigns the society, the media (and particularly TV broadcasting) should take a leading role in making a balanced image of Islam in the society. It is well known that such gaps are always filled with incompetent primitive apologetic or, on

the contrary, provocative Islamophobic materials, which, unfortunately, often leads to disastrous results, including in Russia.

Special role in the harmonization of ethno-confessional relations will play orientalists, because the science has no borders and gathers a variety of people. Governments Western countries (and Russia) should actively attract scholars on Islam as official experts. During the past 50 years the volume of researches on Islam has considerably increased in the West and in Russia, as well as the cooperation of scientists on Islamic studies has extended, and it is clearly seen in the journal publications¹.

In conclusion, it should be recognized that although each publication has rational arguments, none of the politicians, journalists and scholars are not ready now to represent a specific set of measures aimed to harmonizing the ethno-confessional relations in Western Europe. Nevertheless, this study let us hope that mutual efforts of Europeans and Muslims in the West and in the East will make possible the creation of a common home for people of all cultures and faiths in Europe.

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¹ See, for instance, the journals «at-Tasamoh» (Oman), «Orient» (Russia) and «Russia in Global Policy».