



Anti-Islamic reactions in the EU after the terrorist acts against the USA

A collection of country reports from RAXEN National Focal Points (NFPs)

Second report: Reactions from 25th September to 19th October

Vienna, 29th November 2001

Executive Summary

Following the tragic terrorist attacks in the USA on 11th September the EUMC found that there was a pressing need to follow closely the possible negative repercussions on racial and xenophobic attitudes and events in civil societies in Europe. On the basis of national reports drafted by its RAXEN network of National Focal Points (NFPs), the EUMC has produced a first short-term report on anti-Islamic reactions in all countries of the European Union on 9th October 2001.

In order to have a longer term and regular monitoring on attitudes/incidents towards Muslim/Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups, the EUMC has decided to follow up the first report and continue to closely monitor the situation at least until the end of the year 2001.

This report covers the period from the 25th September to the 19th October. It is a collection of edited country reports that, according to the EUMC request, have addressed in particular the following issues:

- acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural or religious minorities (especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups or new types of victims), related to the recent terrorist attacks in the USA;
- good practises and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence;
- reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends.

Replies were received from 14 Member States. It should be considered that the Member States have different systems in collecting data: some have implemented a rather elaborated and comprehensive approach, while others have none at all.

On the basis of the reports some general observations can be made:

- **acts of violence/aggression:**

in most of the countries physical attacks towards members of minority groups have been in a rather small number, with two exceptions (Denmark and the Netherlands).

Verbal abuse, however, has been widely reported in most countries, in the form of

- verbal harassment
- direct verbal aggression,
- insults and threats by telephone or mail,
- verbal abuse on the Internet, etc.

Targets were mainly Muslim organisations and people of Arab origin, but also people of different ethnic background.

- **changes of attitudes of the EU population:**

to this regard the picture is mixed: in some countries opinion polls show that most of the population has not changed its opinion on Islam as a consequence of the terrorist attacks. In other countries, however, there are signs that the situation may be worsening.

Messages of support to Muslim organisations by citizens of the EU-member states, intercultural meetings and discussions and organised visits to mosques and Islamic cultural centres have also been reported in several countries (Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands).

It can generally also be said that in most countries a large and renewed interest, in particular towards the Islamic culture, has become noticeable. This is reflected in the large amount of public discourse, media reports, books editions (in particular the Koran) focused on Muslim cultures. This, however, does not necessarily mean an increased acceptance.

On the other hand, in all countries a latent Islamophobia has used the present circumstances to come to light, finding its expression in the mentioned acts of physical and verbal abuse. These episodes and other signs (i.e. the results of opinion polls in The Netherlands) seem to indicate that in some countries the gap between the main population and the minorities is still large.

Several reports (Austria, Germany, The Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden) hint at the fact that Muslims feel surrounded by suspicion and diffidence, and that they are constantly demanded to demonstrate their disapproval of terrorism. As a result of increased attention by the media (not always unbiased) and the police, a general feeling of insecurity may be growing among minorities.

- **good practice to reduce prejudice:**

as in the first days after the terrorist attacks, in many Member States national institutions and governments have continued to show solidarity and support for the Islamic community in order to avoid the possibility that it is identified with terrorism, through declarations, speeches and meetings with Islamic and other faiths' religious leaders.

In some member states campaigns for intercultural tolerance and dialogue have been launched and platforms for intercultural dialogue have also been established (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands).

- **reaction by politicians and other opinion leaders:**

the issue of the attack and its consequences continues to have a high impact on the political discourse in most EU countries. Most of the political forces have maintained the line of conciliation and solidarity with the Islamic community that emerged immediately after the 11th September.

However, as the shock of the attacks subsides several political forces have started to try to capitalize on the event. In particular the issue of security has been closely linked with that of immigration in several countries, where restrictions to immigration or tighter controls on foreigners have been called for (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal). This is contributing to creating an atmosphere of insecurity and intolerance, especially in cases where Muslims are presented as an “internal security threat”.

The attitude of some media in a number of countries (Greece, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal) has also been questioned, as certain initiatives and the tone of some reports have been accused of contributing to perpetuating stereotypes or even raising hostility and prejudice.

General conclusions

The general attitude of EU citizens towards minorities shows an ambivalent picture. There are signs of both positive (intercultural dialogue, increased interest in the Islamic culture) and negative developments (acts of Islamophobia, some attempts at presenting immigration as a threat to the EU societies).

It is of course too early to draw general conclusions but several reports point out that politicians and other opinion leaders will play a key role in influencing the future orientation of the public opinions.