# Muslims in Europe: Challenges of Cultural Integration

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## Description, Abstract, or Artist's Statement

Muslims in Europe are faced challenges of cultural and religious integration which affect business practices and socio-economic success. This paper looks at the current Muslim situation in Europe from both a Muslim and native European perspective. The contrast between public information targeted at European Muslims originating from the European Union as opposed to Muslim home-countries is examined, as are the challenges posed by Muslim-majority Turkey's application for membership in the European Union.

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# Conference Program

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**5:00 - 6:00    Registration Opens, Hyatt Dorado Beach Resort and Country Club**

**6:00 - 7:00    Opening Reception, Hyatt Dorado Beach Resort and Country Club**

# Muslims in Europe: Challenges of Cultural Integration

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## Abstract

Muslims in Europe are faced challenges of cultural and religious integration which affect business practices and socio-economic success. This paper looks at the current Muslim situation in Europe from both a Muslim and native European perspective. The contrast between public information targeted at European Muslims originating from the European Union as opposed to Muslim home-countries is examined, as are the challenges posed by Muslim-majority Turkey's application for membership in the European Union.

## Introduction

There is a long history of European interaction with the Muslim world, from the Crusades, to the Muslim rule of Spain from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries, and most recently the post-World War II migrations of Muslim peoples to various countries in Europe. Conservative estimates count over 15 million Muslims currently living in European Union (EU) member countries that joined before 2004. The Muslim population of Europe is large and diverse, and in many cases has been in Europe for several generations. (Douthat 2005) This paper examines why Muslim business practices have thus far been largely unsuccessful in adapting to European norms, and why there is persistent resistance to the Muslim presence in Europe.

## Muslims in Europe

Variations in religious and cultural practices among Muslims from different countries and their relative level of integration into their host European cultures has thus far created only mild changes in Muslim business practices and consumer behavior. European Muslims have migrated from various countries to settle in different EU-member countries. To cite just two examples, the overwhelming majority of Germany's Muslims, 68%, come from Turkey. In France, most Muslims come from Algeria, who compose 30% of French Muslims. (Bowen 2004) Islam is transnational, so the practice of the religion and its subsequent effect on cultural, and by extension, consumer behavior does not vary significantly, even among diasporic populations. Islam exists in a "global public space", and has little of the diversity of religious practice found in the

Judeo-Christian world. (ibid.) This has led to widespread misunderstandings and misperceptions among native European populations, and has had an adverse effect on the full social and commercial participation of European Muslim populations, even among those Muslim individuals and families that have been in Europe long enough to have become citizens. In discussing recent events in Muslim Europe, Gilles Kepel in his renowned book *The War for Muslim Minds*, notes "…fundamental questions about the contract of citizenship are being raised, with integration and separatism for Muslims in Europe hanging in the balance." (Kepel 2004) Muslims in Europe are being

marginalized socially and economically by their own actions and by the reactions of many European governments.

In attempting to integrate their Muslim populations, EU-member countries, particularly France, are trying to shape a Euro-Islam by creating public policy specifically aimed at Muslims. This not only goes against post-World War II European legal standards and policies encouraging social integration and tolerance of religious and other minorities, it has also been largely ineffective and has met with considerable resistance. (ibid.) Because of considerable efforts from Muslim leaders, European Muslims have not developed an identity fundamentally separate from Muslim lifestyles in majority Muslim countries. Attempts to suppress Muslim traditions and religious practices, for example, the banning of women's headscarves in France, has been a European reaction to the inability and/or unwillingness of Muslims to assimilate into European society. It is also a manifestation of European unwillingness to fully embrace cultural and religious

diversity. In the EU, state-supported economies and welfare systems are assumed to take precedence over religious practice. A recent study finds that "France raises the stakes of diasporic self-definition by challenging the cultural, political, and even religious legitimacy of any sort of extension of a citizen's life beyond the state borders." (Bowen 2004) There have been strong arguments against the integration of Muslims into European society from both sides of the spectrum. Many European officials feel that Muslim culture is antithical to modern European society. Negotiations that took place in October 2005 to consider the application of Muslim-majority Turkey for full membership in the EU were met with significant resistance. Much has been written in Europe about this event, which is viewed as fraught with insoluble problems. (Anderson 2005) At the same time, Muslims both in Europe and abroad are concerned that too much participation in European culture and commerce will corrupt the practice of Islam in Europe. (Birnbaum 2005)

**Integrating Muslims in Europe**
There have been several acts of Islamist terror in Europe recently, most notably in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005. Violent Islamic extremism and subsequent European suspicion of Muslims has made it increasingly difficult for Muslims to integrate into the mainstream of European culture and business. In Europe, Muslims tend to congregate in ghettos around large cities, finding more comfort in shared religious practices, customs, and cuisines, even though these Muslim ghettos are almost always multi-national. The recent electoral strength of anti-immigration parties, particularly in France and Austria, have been largely the result of a reluctance of Muslims to enter the European socio-cultural mainstream and the inability of Europeans to accept Muslims into daily life. The newly appointed Prime Minister in France and the election of a new conservative Chancellor in the recent German federal elections are partly the result of an intense concern among native European citizens about the rise of radical Islam in Europe. French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin (de Villepin 2003) and German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Gizzi 2005) have publicly announced their opposition to Turkish membership in the EU and expressed concern about the negative impact of Muslim immigrants in Europe. At the same time, there are  extensive missionary efforts originating in Muslim-majority countries that

"urge Muslims residing elsewhere in the world to return to the correct practice of Islam." (Bowen 2005)  Fundamentalist Islam's conflicts with the ideals of European enlightenment is of great concern.  Many Europeans wonder if there might be a link between lazzi faire multiculturalism and radical Islam, that is, is excessive tolerance making it too easy for extremist Islam to organize?  This is an extremely difficult question for a liberal society to ask, let alone answer.  The need for tolerance and assimilation that come with allowing immigration are not only public ideals, but are necessary to maintain a society in which much needed immigrants are required to maintain Europe's high standard of living.

Europe urgently needs immigrants to counteract the effects of their aging population, declining birthrates, and rapidly shrinking native populations.  Nearby Muslim countries like Turkey, Algeria, and Morocco need the outlet of emigration to diffuse the effects of poverty and rising populations.  (United Nations 2001).  This combination of "push factors" and "pull factors" means "accommodating immigrant –origin populations appears destined to remain at the top of the list of political priorities in Europe." (Ireland 2004)  Allowing and encouraging immigration will be a necessary part of 21$^{st}$ Century Europe, and almost all of the countries geographically near to Europe with populations ready and willing to emigrate are Muslim-majority.

Europe features the most intense interactions and integration, both cultural and economic, of the West with the Muslim world.  It is important to understand the difference between Muslim and Islam, particularly in the context of the European Muslim experience.  In a recent interview in the respected Austrian newsmagazine *profil,* noted critic of Islam and co-producer of the controversial film *Submission* (for which her co-producer Theo van Gogh was murdered by Islamic extremists) Ayaan Hirsi Ali explains an important distinction often overlooked by those in non-Muslim societies:  "Muslims are individuals… they are reasonable people who think and are responsible for their own actions.  In contrast, Islam is a moral framework from the seventh century." (Treichler 2005)   Ali believes that this Islamist perspective is antithical to modern European society.  Islam-centric thought must be appreciated for non-Muslims to begin to understand the importance of the integration of Muslim business practices and consumer behavior in European and other free market economies.  Muslim sensibilities are frequently ignored or ridiculed by the European mass media.  European marketing campaigns, which tend to be bolder and more sexually graphic than those found in the rest of the world, are seen as offensive by most Muslims.  A recent study of controversial product marketing finds that "geography is not a major determinant of attitudes", and notes that Muslim perspectives and expectations remain independent of European influence.  (Waller, Fam, and Erdogan 2005)  European Muslims have met with only limited success in their attempts to establish marketing practices that are in line with their beliefs.


**European Muslim Perspectives**
To even attempt to understand the potential effect of Muslim business practices on western economies, it is essential to set aside the well-publicized activities of radical

and often violent Islamic extremists.  This point is frequently emphasized by many Muslims who are working to integrate Muslim people, countries, and business practices into the EU.  Turkish Muslims represent perhaps the best example of these efforts because, unlike other Muslim-majority countries, Turkey has a realistic chance of eventually becoming a member of the EU.   While in Europe on a recent sabbatical, I had the opportunity to interview Uygar Mustafa Sertel, Vice Consul of the Turkish Consulate in Salzburg, Austria.   After extensive reading and conversations with many European Muslims, I felt Mr. Sertel represented a balanced view of the Muslim experience in Europe.  He is not an ambassador to a major European country who sets official policy and makes public pronouncements, and he is also not an average Muslim citizen or resident of Europe.  He is well-educated and connected to official Turkey, but is also close enough to the expatriate Muslim community to have a feel for the general mood of European Muslims.  He is pro-business and pro-EU, and claims to be a devout and practicing Muslim.  He feels that Turkish membership in the European Union would be a way to "build a bridge to western economies", but also recognizes that there are currently powerful political trends in Europe, particularly in France and Germany, that would strongly resist Turkish membership.  At the time of our interview, talks on Turkish membership in the EU had not yet occured, and he worried that recent regime changes in France and Germany would not bode well for the success of Turkish membership.  Mr. Sertel emphasized that the economic elite and the middle class in Turkey "understand what EU membership would mean economically and for our weak currency", but that there is a vocal and powerful minority of Islamic fundamentalists in Turkey that oppose membership, and would like to move Turkey away from their western European orientation and create a Turkish state focused towards the Islamic states of the Middle East.  There is an important decision on the direction to be taken, according to Mr. Sertel.  Is Turkey to be aligned with Europe, and become a commercial and cultural bridge to the Islamic world, or will Turkey become focused on the Muslim-majority countries of the Middle East, and function merely as a buffer to resist European and western influences in the Muslim world?  (Staninger 2005)

Many observers both inside and outside of Europe feel that the addition of Turkey to the EU is vital for the security of the continent, because EU membership will anchor the Muslim world's only pro-western democracy in Europe.  There are also powerful voices in Europe that oppose Turkey's candidacy.  The aforementioned opening of talks discussing Turkish membership were stalled recently when Austria opposed the inclusion of Turkey in the EU.  Austria has served as the buttress between Christian Europe and the Muslim world for centuries, and they are wary to any incursions that would put them at the center of the geo-political battle between western democracies and developing Muslim countries.  (CNN, 3 Oct 2005)   In a related development, the recent election of conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany, who has long been a vocal opponent of Turkish membership in the EU, represents a general shift to the political right for Europe.  (Cohen, 2005)  Much of the current right-leaning political ideology in Europe is based upon a resistance to immigration in general, and Muslim immigration in particular.  (ibid.)

**Muslims in the European Union**

The impact of Muslim integration into the European Union cannot be underestimated. If Turkey's candidacy for EU membership is approved, Muslims will suddenly outnumber Protestants in the EU. (Ferguson 2005) This is significant because Judeo-Christian religious participation in Europe has been declining for many years, and subsequently the effect of religion on business practices and consumer behavior has become minimal. (Knox 2005) Conversely, attendance at European mosques is robust. Many more Muslims than native Europeans consider religion central to their daily lives, which directly effects the way they conduct business and participate in the marketplace. (Rasche 2005) There is much discussion in the European-Muslim press about ways to participate and thrive in the global economy while maintaining a truly Muslim perspective. Most Muslims in the EU are not among the educational, economic, and cultural elite. If that were the case, they likely would have had no need or desire to emigrate, and would have remained in their home countries. European Muslims tend to be more traditional and conservative, which makes even more difficult the task of integrating these immigrant populations into the European mainstream. (ibid.)

Muslims have a long history of successful commercial activity, and established norms of business practice. Trade and commerce is expected and encouraged. As the Holy Quaran states "And when the prayer is finished, then you disperse through the land, and seek the Bounty of God, and remember God much, that you will prosper." (62:10) (Holy Quaran) Business practice and consumer activity are much discussed among Muslim intellectuals and business analysts. Restrictions on the charging or payment of interest (usury) is but one example of the challenges devout Muslims must face when participating in modern commerce. A recent article about the Muslim perspective on e-commerce notes that "In Islam there is no isolation between the spiritual and material (ritual and ordinary actions), for all actions performed in the obedience to the command of God are considered as the acts of virtue and half of the religious duty including e-commerce." (Zainul, Osman, and Mazlan 2004) While Muslim teaching encourages and celebrates commerce, Muslim business practice is frequently at odds with established methods of western commercial behavior.

**Conclusion**
Recent research and analysis suggests that Muslim culture and Islamic law are antithical to successful participation in the world economy. Stefan Voigt observes that "compelling reasons exist to suppose that Islamic values are a central cause of the poor economic performance of Muslim countries." (Voigt 2005) Voigt concludes that Islamic values are not conducive to the three core institutions of free societies: constitutional democracy, rule of law, and market economies.

Considering the profound impact worldwide Muslim society has had on global politics and business in the first few years of the 21st Century, it is essential to understand how better to integrate Muslim attitudes and behaviors into the global marketplace. This is proving difficult to achieve. In a public statement on August 11, 2005, renowned author Salman Rushdie called for a "Muslim Reformation" to help solve the problems of Islam. In comments made about European Muslims, he notes "the Muslim Diaspora (is)… in many ways at odds with the cultures among which they live." (CNN, 11 Aug

2005)  In describing what he concedes is a negative analysis of the future of young Muslims in Europe, Kepel speculates that their "rigid Islamic identity leads them to reject cultural integration into the European environment and to embrace cultural separatism."  (Kepel 2004)  This is a scenario that sadly seems to be playing out.  When I began research for this paper while on sabbatical in Europe, I postulated that an aggressive policy designed to further the integration of Muslim Europe into mainstream business and consumer culture was a strategy that would have success in overcoming social misunderstandings and misbehavior.  This is a strategy that worked well in Germany and Austria (not to mention Japan) in the years following World War II.  After extensive research, interviews, media analysis, and personal experience from many years spent in Europe, I must unfortunately conclude that this is unlikely to occur.  The cultural and economic chasms between native Europeans and Muslim Europeans detailed above are too great to be overcome in the near future.  It will be up to the next generation of European-born Muslims to create an environment wherein the vast social and economic benefits of European society can be enjoyed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

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