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### **SHADOW OF ISLAM OVER EUROPE**

Author: Aleksei Malashenko, Professor at the Moscow State Institute (University) of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia; expert with the Moscow Carnegie Center; Doctor of Sciences (Hist.)

Population growth among the Muslims caused by the ban on birth control traditional for Islam is one of the most alarming aspects of what is called the Islamic problem. It causes alarm among the Muslims' closest European neighbors, in Russia and Southeast Asia. Recently, this alarm has reached the United States. Is this fear justified?

In 1980, there were about 780 million Muslims in the world; early in 2004 the Islamic population was 1,300 million, or about 22 percent of the 6,100 million-strong planet's population. In China and India (the populations of which are over 1 billion strong) the Muslim minority comprises about 20 percent in each country. Between 1995 and 2000 the Muslim population increased at the fastest pace in India (20.6 percent) and China (14.7 percent). They are followed by Muslim countries: Pakistan (5.2 percent), Indonesia (3.8 percent), Bangladesh (2.7 percent) and Nigeria (3.2 percent).<sup>1</sup> The figures demonstrated by other Muslim countries show that by the rate of population growth they, taken together, far outstrip the two leaders.

#### **Finer Details of Population Growth**

The outstripping population growth in the Muslim world is not extraordinary: better health care and lower child mortality can easily explain it. Demographic analysis, however, has its political dimensions and should be discussed together with them.

Religion and demography should not be discussed together: there are no universal criteria of religious affiliation. What is more, such criteria can hardly be formulated. We all know that according to different sources, the number of Muslims in Russia ranges from 3 to 15 or even 20 million. Some people believe that only those who pray three (or five) times a day, regularly attend the mosques and perform all other rites can be counted as Muslims. Others associate religious affiliation with ethnic, or clan culture and use the

term “ethnic Muslims.” They guide themselves by the principle of ethnic-confessional rather than by religious identity. I believe that we should guide ourselves by the person’s self-identification.

Outside identification is no less important: according to this principle the members of all traditionally Muslim ethnoses are considered Muslims. In this case the Muslims are described as a confessional community and correlated with other, non-religious (political, geographic, and ethnic) communities. For example, there is a lot of talk about the relations between the Muslim world and the United States, Europe or Russia; the figures of Muslim migration and oil reserves in the Islamic world are constantly quoted. (None, however, has ever bothered to assess the iron ore reserves of the Christian world.) The criterion of belonging to the Muslim umma is much wider than the religious and ritual criteria.

In this context we can discuss the demography of the Muslim world (if not strictly correct this approach can still be accepted as logical).

The number of the Muslims scattered across the world cannot be taken for a prerequisite for a certain “demographic revolution.” Still, in some regions and countries the issue has become a sensitive one. This is true of the non-Muslim areas bordering on the Muslim territories with the rapidly growing populations, the growing Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries and an active Muslim migration. In the latter two cases the number of the faithful is increasing synchronously with the decreasing birthrate among the non-Muslim majority.

The urgency of the demographic issue is inevitably heated by political, ethnic and other non-confessional conflicts that can easily develop into religious confrontations.

The academic and journalist communities have coined a term “the Christian-Muslim” (or “Muslim-Christian”) borderland. In the past, it was a geographic term used in Russia, for example, to stress its unique closeness to the Muslim world and the poly-confessional nature of its society.

It would be much more correct to apply the term to the globe (Latin America being probably the only exception) where the Christians, Hindus and Muslims communicate within the same state living on the same streets, squares, and houses. State and regional borders are important yet the confessional borderland should be discussed in the cultural, ideological, and sociopolitical terms.

There are regions in which the confessional borderland is much more obvious and much more concrete being filled with very prosaic conflict-prone content. In these places the demographic problems develop into a drama. In all such zones different confessional communities live side and by side and communicate daily.

There is another factor that heats up an interest in the demographic factor. I have in mind political and social rivalry of groups of people, which, in the recent decades, has added confessional tinges to the already existing ethnic ones.

The Middle East and Europe are two regions, among others, where the demographic factor may cause grave social, political, and cultural consequences.

Let’s have a look at the Middle East. A superficial observer may disregard the demographic factor as unimportant. More careful examination reveals, however, that the Palestinian resistance now acquiring Islamic nature regards the increasing numerical gap between the Arabs and the Jews as the main factor of victory. First, the Muslim Arabs who are Israeli citizens are demonstrating an outstripping birthrate; the same can be said

of the citizens of the future Palestinian state. In 2004, there were over 1,070,000 Muslims (16 percent of the total population); 450,000 of them were below 15. The level of birthrate among the Muslims comprises 3.4 percent against 1.4 percent among the Jews.<sup>2</sup>

Second, the population of the Palestinian Autonomy has topped the figure of 3.5 million; its population growth exceeding the rates demonstrated by Israel. For example, among the 1.25 million-strong Muslim population of the Gaza Strip population growth reached 4 percent, an absolute world record. On the average, population growth among the Palestinians is three times bigger than the growth of Israel's Jewish population.<sup>3</sup>

Third, the problem of the Palestinian refugees has not been settled. Meanwhile, together with the Palestinian population they outnumber the Jewish population two times. In any case, Israel and its 5.7 million-strong population (2004 figure) looks like an island in the "Muslim sea." Indeed, the population strength of its immediate neighbors (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt) is over 100 million. The numerical supremacy of the Muslim Arab population is especially glaring against the dwindling Jewish migration, the potentials of which are nearly exhausted. In 2003, Israel received only 23,200 migrants, or 31 percent less than in 2002. There are despaired people among the Israelis ready to leave the country.

Arabs are encouraged by their numerical strength over the Israelis. I should say that the ideologists of the resistance and Arab politicians in general avoid public statements about the Muslims' numerical supremacy and their outstripping growth probably because they avoid reminding the world about their weakness and an inability to defeat "small Israel." In private talks, however, Palestinians insist that they are doomed to the final victory because of their large numbers. If one agrees with this one will have to recognize the importance of the demographic factor within a limited geographic area and the global echo of the local supremacy.

## Europe in 2050

Europe has long been concerned with the mounting Muslim migration. According to certain forecasts, European population will drop by about 14 percent to reach the figure of 630 million.<sup>4</sup> Between 1950 and 2000, the share of Muslims in Europe increased from 1 to 3 percent; their absolute figure being between 14 to 20 million. There is an opinion that by 2050 Muslims will comprise a third or even half of Europe's population.

By joining the EU Turkey will create a Muslim demographic explosion in the Old World. With its 70-million-strong population it will become the second largest country after Germany and will outnumber the U.K., France and Italy by 15-20 million. Sooner or later Turkey will catch up with Germany and outnumber it too. This is probably why 57 percent of Germans are against Turkey's EU membership.

France is home to over 5 million Muslims; in Italy the number of Muslims increased from 240,000 in 1992 to 650,000-700,000 in 1999; 3 million Muslims are living in Germany; over 1.5 million in the U.K., there are 730,000 Muslims in the Netherlands, 710,000-720,000 in Switzerland; the Muslim population of Sweden and Spain is assessed at over 400,000 in each country; about 300,000 live in Belgium; the same number lives in Austria; there are about 200,000 in Denmark. Finland has remained outside the flow. In 1999, there were slightly over 10,000 Muslims (mainly from

Somalia) living in it. Finland inherited from the Russian Empire a 1,000-strong Tartar community.

The number of Muslims in Greece is rapidly growing. In 2003, a top Greek bureaucrat told me privately that there were 500,000 Muslims living in his country and added that the real figure might be twice as big.

Large Muslim enclaves living according their own unwritten laws are coming into existence in large West European cities their populations being de facto exempt from official jurisdiction. For example, 85 percent of those living in La Bricarde in Marseille are North African Muslims. Eighty-five percent of the Malmo (Sweden's second largest city) population is migrants, mostly Muslims. With the growth of Muslim immigration they will tend to live in compact groups. The newcomers will obviously prefer to live among their own people in expectation of support (real or illusory) from the community.

One can easily predict the growth of Muslim migration to Europe: people do want to live in better conditions. Muslim West-bound migration is a sign of a crisis and a result of the asymmetry of the economic potentials of Europe and the Islamic world. Europe will remain highly attractive for the Muslims who with time stop feeling themselves aliens in the Old World.

The steady population growth in the Near East, North Africa, South Asia and other parts of the Muslim world will feed migration.

In the 1990s, people from Pakistan and Bangladesh comprised nearly half of Muslim migration to Britain; Algerians account for nearly half of the Muslim population of France. It seems that in the near future Turkish migration (nearly 65 percent of the Germany's Muslims are Turks) will become Europe's internal problem. Turkish migrants, as well as Bosnian and Albanian migrants whose number is rapidly mounting in Italy and Austria will no longer be regarded as an outside demographic factor.

Even though these figures do give a more or less adequate idea about the Muslim demographic dynamics they are far from absolute. We all know that certain European politicians, as well as local Muslim leaders, tend to overestimate. While the former want to scare the public so as to ensure support of the nationalist-minded part of society, the latter are out to make Muslim presence legitimate on the strength of its numbers. For example, it is frequently stated that Italy's Muslim population is 2 million strong, that there are up to 7 million Muslims living in France, etc. Significantly, even experts on Islam and the Muslims in Europe say that the real number of Muslims (those with citizenships, legal and illegal migrants) is much larger than the official one.

The scale of Muslim migration to Eastern Europe is negligible. People from the Northern Caucasus, Chechens in the first place treated with caution in Western Europe as well, are mentioned mostly to scare the public.

The Muslim population of the Balkans (within the former Yugoslavian territory) has considerably increased: there are over 4 million Muslims there as against 2.1 million of the early 1950s. Forty percent of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina and over 70 percent of the 3 million-strong population of Albania are Muslims. Bulgaria so far is the only exception: in the early 1990s, its Muslim population dropped from 17.2 to 7 percent because of massive outflow of Turks to Turkey.

In any case, Islam is the second largest religion in Europe. Time has come to accept it as an autochthonous religion. From this point of view Western Europe is drawing closer to Russia where the Muslims and Orthodox Christians have been always

living together. It is interesting to note that the earlier name of the Volga, the main Russian river, was “Idel” given to it in the 10th century by the Bulgar who were Muslims.

Autochthonous Europeans turn Muslims; there are no exact figures yet it is known that in France alone 50,000 adopt Islam every year. Some 10,000 to 15,000 (or even up to 50,000 according to other sources) Italians became Muslims, over 100,000 Germans, 10,000 Brits and about 3,000 Spaniards. In Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium thousands adopt Islam. They are mostly women, according to certain sources the ratio is 4 : 1.

In the coming decade Europe will have to readjust its identity. The French, Germans, British, Scandinavians and Italians will have to adopt the Islamic tradition as an organic and legitimate part of European culture even though its perception still causes doubts. Tens of millions of Muslims will become Europeans: together with the desire to blend with the European tradition they will preserve their genetic and confessional loyalty to their historical homelands. In Oslo, on the Europaradeits square there is a snack bar with an impossible name of “Viking Kebab.” This is not a symbol - this is a trend.

### Muslims in Russia

Between 1950 and 2000, the share of Muslims in the USSR/CIS increased from 8.5 to 18.5 percent. If the Soviet Union continued to exist within its old borders the share of Muslims would have been about 20 percent; the high birthrate in Central Asia would have brought up their share to 25 percent. In the 1980s, it was the Soviet military establishment that was concerned with this more than the civilian public: the outstripping growth of Muslim conscripts (with inadequate educational levels and lack of physical fitness) could have diminished the Soviet army’s battle-worthiness.

History cannot be changed therefore I shall limit myself to Russia.

According to different sources, there are from 14.5 to about 19 million ethnic Muslims in the Russian Federation. It is sometimes predicted that by about 2050 the Muslims will comprise nearly one-third, or even half, of Russia’s population. Such assessments are obviously emotional and speculative.

Assessments of the numerical strength of Muslims in Russia are contradictory. The majority of recent publications cite the figure of 20 million. Being quoted several times by the president of Russia it was firmly put into circulation; one of such speeches was delivered in 2003 at the OIC conference in Kuala-Lumpur. The Foreign Ministry of Russia quoted similar figures<sup>5</sup> yet they need explanation.

In the mid-1990s, assessments of the numerical strength of the Muslims of Russia varied greatly. Some people proceeded from the 1989 population census to quote the figure of 11.5 million; the Foreign Ministry of Russia cited the figure of 17 million; Ravil Gaynutdin, Chairman of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Russia (SAMCR), 19 million; Murad Zargishev, former deputy chairman of the RF Supreme Soviet for the Freedom of Conscience and Religion, 20 million, while Farid Asadullin, SAMCR deputy chairman, 23 million.<sup>6</sup> In 2000, one of the heads of the Information Center at the Council of Muftis of Russia cited the figure of 26 million.<sup>7</sup>

The last nationwide population census established that 14.5 million belonged to Muslim culture by tradition. The figure caused disappointment among the Muslim spiritual leaders used to large numbers. Ravil Gaynutdin explained the Muslims’

diminished numerical strength by the deficiency of the methods employed. The number of Muslims may turn out to be much larger if foreign citizens residing in Russia and migrants are also counted. For example, according to official statistics, there are 621,000 Azeris living in Russia, while in fact there are over 1 million of them. There is no exact information about seasonal migrants coming to Russia from Central Asia. According to unofficial information supplied by local and central departments of internal affairs the number of Muslims from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan living in Russia at any given period of time may be over 1 million. It is unclear whether children of mixed marriages should be counted among the Muslims. According to the Islamic tradition they are Muslims; the *Musul'manskaia gazeta* reports that in Tatarstan 50 percent of children are born in mixed families.<sup>8</sup> This suggests that the number of Muslims in Russia is larger than officially stated.

The demographic dynamics of the Muslims of Russia in the last fifteen years testifies that the country will not experience an "Islamic demographic revolution" (of which much has been said) in the near future. Between the population censuses the number of Tartars, the largest Muslim ethnos of Russia (5 million) increased by 36,000. On the other hand, against the diminishing numerical strength of the Slavic population (since 1989, the number of Russians dropped from 119 to 115 million) the number of Muslim citizens of Russia is increasing in absolute and relative terms. The latter is typical of the Northern Caucasus: between 1989 and 2002, the numerical strength of the Ingushes increased by 191 percent; the Kumyks, 152 percent; the Darghins, 144 percent; the Avars, 139 percent; the Kabardins, 134 percent.

This shows that far from experiencing a natural population decline the North Caucasian republics have demonstrated the highest population growth in Russia. In 1989-1997, population growth in Dagestan was 16.2 percent, the highest in Russia.

The number of Bashkirs, the second largest Muslim ethnos of Russia, increased by 124 percent between 1989 and 2002.

I have to say that the outstripping increase of the number of Muslims will not produce a confessional "revolution": Russia will remain a Christian Orthodox country with a gradually increasing Muslim community.

In Russia the demographic factor acquired special urgency because the Muslim population rapidly increases in the Northern Caucasus, the conflict-prone region. There the Muslims' numerical growth takes place against the background of the dwindling numbers of Slavic Christians: the result is impressive. Today, Muslims account for 70 percent of population in the North Caucasian republics; their number increased twice in the last two decades while the share of the Slavic population dropped (for various reasons) from 29.3 percent in 1980 to 19 percent in 2000. The Muslim enclave in the South of Russia is gradually widening; driven by economic difficulties and unemployment excessive able-bodied population moves to the neighboring regions causing a lot of discontent among the local people. Normally, the migrants prefer to live in compact isolated groups so as to defend their ethnic and confessional interests; cultural traditions and everyday behavior also differ. Even though the Muslims' increasing numbers per se do not threaten stability in negative social and economic conditions they may cause religious and ethnic tension.

The demographic factor here is not a purely domestic phenomenon. As distinct from the Soviet Union the Muslim population of which outnumbered the Muslim

populations of all its neighbors, Russia's Muslim population is more or equal to theirs. Its population strength is less than that of Pakistan and very close to Bangladesh. The total number of people living in Turkey and Iran is larger than of those living in Russia. In the 1970s, the Soviet Union's population strength was twice as large as that of Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan taken together. Today, Russia's strategic population resource does not look overwhelming - its neighbors change their attitude to it accordingly.

This is gradually altering the psychology of the Muslims of Russia who are abandoning the traditional Soviet "younger brother" posture. They quite rightly believe that the minority status inside the country is relative, to a certain extent, because they are part of a huge worldwide community whose numerical strength is larger than Russia's population by more than an order. Practically at each Muslim event in Russia the total number of Muslims in the world is quoted.

There are no exact figures of the number of Slavs adopting Islam in Russia and the CIS; from time to time, however, Slavic Islamic communities do arise in Russia. The latest appeared in Omsk in 2004. According to the *Vse ob islame* newspaper, there are 10,000 Muslim Slavs in Kiev alone.<sup>9</sup> So far the number of such people remains insignificant.

"Muslim wives," that is, Slavic women married to Muslims is another important subject. There are no exact figures for Russia; in different families religious relations are different. Russian wives of Arabs frequently become Muslims. From time to time Russian newspapers run stories about zealous neophytes. Slavic women married to Tartars, Azeris and men from the Northern Caucasus do not regard themselves as Muslims; the religious component in such families is negligible (marriages to Chechens are the only exception).

Parents select one of the two religions for their children; according to the Islamic traditions children born into mixed families become Muslims. On the whole the number of such marriages is too small to talk about a new generation of Muslims.

A considerable number of neophytes adopted the new religion for pragmatic considerations or to stir up a scandal. In Russia, the Afghan war produced several scores of Muslims; there are cases when the military who fought in Chechnia embraced Islam.

The Islamic neophytes are not true Muslims; they remain secular people far removed from true faith; Islam and Western values coexist in their minds. They will probably never become part of the umma; it is even less likely that their children will follow in their steps.

No matter what, a narrow circle of people each devoted to his new religion in his own way appeared outside the Muslim world.

Muslim clerics and politicians interpret this as another evidence of Islam's supremacy and its general attraction. They do their best to promote the process; Daghestan has set up a Committee for Neophyte Muslims.

The growing numbers of neophytes in Europe cannot tip the balance between the Muslims and non-Muslims yet the fact is skillfully used by the Muslim leaders to demonstrate that Islam can cross cultural and other frontiers.

In a certain sense, adoption of Islam (or, rather return to it) of ethnic Soviet Muslims (turned nearly atheists under Soviet power) started in the late 1980s when the Soviet Union was still alive can be described as an "Islamic Renaissance." Students of religions correctly call it "re-Islamization."

In any case, the demographic aspect is not merely an urgent - it is also the most sensitive - issue in the relationships between the Muslim and the Western world. First, the Muslims are proud of their rapid numerical growth due to the high birthrate - being part of the religious tradition it cannot be regarded as a negative phenomenon.

Second, for the majority of the Muslim states this growth is obviously excessive: it consumes economic growth (if any) and slows down social development. The resultant poverty destabilizes society and causes enmity against the rich.

Third, this forces Muslims to migrate to non-Muslim countries thus causing demographic disbalances and ethnic tension. "Under certain critical circumstances," writes Russian sociologist Anatoly Vishnevsky, "demographic pressure of the South on the North may coincide with military-political pressure resulting in a radical change of the political map of the world, etc."<sup>10</sup> It seems that the world is gradually involved into an unpredictable process.

### In Lieu of a Conclusion

This decade may turn out to be a decisive one. Europe and its allies will have to sort out their attitudes to the Muslim world; they have to accept it at face value and take into account its internal dynamics and demographic processes. This may call for a re-adjustment of the idea of globalism to make it more attractive for the Muslims and to play down the trend toward removing the frontiers between different confessions. The inevitable differences in approaches to the generally accepted values (democracy, human rights, etc.) should be recognized as well as the fact that Muslims are "spreading" across the world and Europe.

In this context it seems that a dialogue with Islamists can be allowed, at least for the sake of preventing the categorical rejection of it developing into a bottomless reservoir of extremism. Within this decade the terms "Islamism" and "Islamic fundamentalism" will shed their absolutely negative hues.

A different approach would mean that the West would impose on the Muslim world its own standards of world politics. This will cause negative response, increase the level of confrontation and may lead to grave results.

There is another variant: the Muslims can be left alone to choose their own way while any interference in their affairs should be reduced to an absolute minimum to avoid unnecessary conflicts. The West should interfere ad hoc by way of response to developments in the Muslim world. Today, this variant looks unreal. I mentioned it to pay tribute to "neo-Orientalist" statements of the "let's leave them in peace - we shall all profit from this" type.

Anybody wishing to produce a forecast should offer at least a concise and clear one. I regret to say that mine is far from optimistic. The tension between the Muslims and the West will mount. The effect of 9/11 was too strong; many regarded it as a sad symbol and the culminating point of the relationships between the Muslim and Western communities in the 20th century. It will cast its shadow on the coming years.

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## NOTES

1 Naselenie i globalizatsia, Moscow, 2002, p. 196.

2 The Moslem Population in Israel. On the Occasion of “Festival of the Sacrifice,” Jerusalem, February 1, 2004, 27/2004. <http://www.cbs.gov.il>

3 John Ward Andersen, The Washington Post, InoPressa.Ru.26.04.2004

4 Naselenie i globalizatsia, p. 202.

5 It was frequently mentioned during the 1996 presidential elections when the team of the first president of Russia Boris Yeltsin was actively playing “the Muslim card.”

6 See: Aleksei Malashenko, Islamskoe vozrozhdenie sovremennoy Rossii, Moscow Carnegie Center, 1998, p. 7.

7 Ali Viacheslav Polosin, “Islam v zavtrashney Rossii,” Musul’manskaia gazeta, No. 4, April-May 2002, p. 13.

8 Ibid.

9 Ali Viacheslav Polosin, “O chem shumite, narodnye vitii?..” Vse ob islame, No. 4-5, July-August 2002, p. 21.

10 Anatoli Vishnevsky, “Velikaia malonaselennai derzhava,” Rossia v global’noy politike, Vol. 1, No. 3, July-September 2003, p. 69