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# Islam and Religion in the EU Political System

SARA SILVESTRI

*This article examines the increasing relevance of Islam and religion in the institutional arrangement of the EU post-Maastricht and the future policy implications for the complex political system of the EU. By adopting a combination of qualitative methodologies that are theoretically rooted in historical institutionalism and in a systemic view of the EU, the paper studies the emergence of Islam and religion as policy issues in two institutional settings, the European Commission and the European Parliament, during the 1990s and up to the first decade of the twenty-first century. The analysis shows a growing attention to faith communities on the part of the Commission, in the post-Maastricht context, culminating in the elaboration of semi-official avenues for encounter and dialogue with religious groups. It also indicates how, in turn, these semi-official practices and the ideas behind them have gradually imposed themselves upon multiple levels of the EU political system, thus opening up an institutional space in the EU for consultations with and 'informal policies' towards faith communities, both within and outside the EU borders.*

## The Issue of Religion

In April 2008, a seminar series on the overarching theme of 'Islam, Christianity and Europe' was inaugurated at the European Parliament in Brussels, jointly organised by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), the Church and Society Commission (CSC), and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), 'in association with Muslim partners'.<sup>1</sup> This initiative was part of a range of activities promoted by the European Union during 2008, a year which had been officially designated by the EU as the 'European Year of Intercultural Dialogue'. On various previous occasions, political groups in the European Parliament had also used the institution's premises for conferences or meetings with European Muslim organisations (Silvestri 2006: ch. 5).<sup>2</sup> These and similar occurrences, over the past decade, have manifested the extent to which religion has gradually appeared not only in national debates across

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Europe, but also in the European sphere, by literally – not just metaphorically – ‘entering’ the whole EU setting, with its institutions, bureaucracies, and political networks.

Many contemporary social scientists have observed the continuous relevance of what is often described as Europe’s religious roots and of what has been perceived as the ‘resurgence’ of religion in twenty-first century Europe (see Davie 2000; Madeley and Enyedi 2003; Fetzer and Soper 2005; Byrnes and Katzenstein 2006; Faltin and Wright 2007; Haynes 2007). Nevertheless, little attention has been devoted to how religion plays out in what Hix (1999) has defined as the ‘political system of the EU’. What is missing in the analysis of religion in contemporary European politics is the ability to appreciate that, although attitudes towards and behaviour in relation to religion are indeed strongly connected to national contexts that are shaped by specific cultures and history, religious concerns and religious actors are present across the whole complex web of relations and political institutions that form and interact with the EU. Hence, observing the role of religion in Europe by considering the EU as a simple juxtaposition of individual countries in which religions are embedded and operate in relation to national interests and national history – as Fetzer and Soper (2005) or Byrnes and Katzenstein (2006) have done – can be a limited exercise.

To a certain extent such a focus on the national sphere can be justified, since domestic politics rather than the supranational European dimension determines voters’ choices and Declaration 11 of the Amsterdam Treaty (later transposed into Article 52 of the draft Constitutional Treaty and then into Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty<sup>3</sup>) ensures that states retain sovereign competence over the management of relations with faith communities and that therefore the EU remains neutral in this regard. However, paragraph 3 of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty also points to the necessity for the EU not only to recognise the identity and specific contribution of each religious and philosophical tradition in Europe but also to ‘maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations’. The very transnational character of religion (Thomas 2005) coupled with the transnational and supranational dimension of the EU institutions, of the mechanisms of EU policy-making, and of the growing importance of networks of politicians, bureaucrats, and lobbyists who operate in and across the EU calls for a consideration of religion from a multi-level EU perspective, rather than from a useful but narrow domestic one.

These considerations generate the need to observe where the notion of religion sits in European public opinion and in voting patterns in European elections (see Boomgaarden and Freire 2009 and van der Brug *et al.* 2009) and also to analyse whether, when, and why religion has been a matter of concern at the EU institutional level, and if it has become a ‘salient’ issue in EU politics, i.e. an issue of political controversy and polarisation in relation to European integration.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Choices**

Silvestri (2005b), Schlesinger and Foret (2006), and some individual contributors to Foret's book (2007, see especially Foret, Willaime, Silvestri, and Massignon) have partially begun to address the gradual emergence of religious sensitivities within the institutional setting of the EU. However, such analyses have been conducted in a fragmented way, by looking at specific issues (e.g. the role of particular religious groups) individually and not holistically at how the topic of religion has played over time in the process of European integration and what the role of religious actors has been. A more holistic and integrated approach is therefore needed. It allows us to combine an analysis of individual actors' behaviour with that of institutional development over time. In order to expose the emergence of religious matters – and attention to Islam in particular – in the EU system the paper is organised around policies and developments in two EU institutions which have a strong supranational character, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

The Council of the European Union (Council) and the Court of Justice of the European Communities (ECJ) are excluded from this article, which is focused on the 'supranational' political dimension of the EU. Despite being an important agent of 'Europeanisation' and integration (see Haltern 2004), the ECJ is not explicitly a political institution and does not deal directly with religious-related matters. On the other hand, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), whose work does concern freedom of religion and other fundamental rights, is not technically an EU institution, although it is closely connected to it and does contribute to a 'Europeanisation' of attitudes and responses to certain issues. The Council is not covered because, being an intergovernmental institution, its interests and choices are heavily dependent on individual member states, and its workings and documents are less transparent and accessible than those of other EU bodies (see Peterson and Shackleton 2006). In addition, it is mainly the Parliament and the Commission that have opened platforms for engaging with experts, advocacy groups and lobbyists (see Greenwood 2003). Hence, religious actors are more likely to be in touch with Commission officials and with offices of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) than with the Council. The Council nevertheless does not remain totally immune to the topic of religion. At times, the Council has even been an explicit promoter of initiatives in this field, as happened during the Italian (2003), the German (2007), and the Slovenian (2008) presidencies.<sup>4</sup> Also, the Brussels offices of the Christian churches (COMECE and the Conference of European Churches, CEC) have gradually established the practice of having formal meetings with each rotating Council Presidency. The press releases produced by COMECE seem to suggest that these meetings are more of a public relations (PR) exercise, rather than a 'push' for particular or 'fundamentalist' agendas. The churches – and more recently also the newly established Muslim pressure group Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe

(FIOE, see Silvestri 2010) – appear more concerned with reminding the Council and the other EU institutions that the religious actors are there and willing to be consulted.

This article provides first a historical institutionalist overview of the gradual opening of the European Commission to religious concerns. Historical institutionalism appears the best angle to explain not only how but also why such a change may have happened. It takes into account the complexities of the multi-level dynamic of relations between political actors and institutions over time. Historical institutionalism considers the degree of power and strategic choices of individual actors, the institutional constraints upon actors, as well as the actors' influence upon institutional structures and practices. This approach looks for 'formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity' (Hall and Taylor 1996: 938). It also emphasises the 'path dependence' of political processes and the 'unintended consequences' of particular courses of action that cannot be reversed and therefore become 'critical junctures' (Pierson 2000).

The section of the study focused on the Commission is based on analyses of: policy papers (Communications, White Papers, press releases, speeches) produced by the European Commission; background materials produced and made available online by its directorates and services; research reports prepared by experts that collaborated with the Commission's President's services (especially the Soul for Europe programme, the Forward Studies Unit, and the Group of Policy Advisers/Bureau of European Policy Advisers) on issues pertaining to the identity and future of Europe, institutional dialogue with religious groups, and Euro-Mediterranean relations, primarily during the 1990s and up to 2002; and personal interviews as well as informal communication with Commission officials and with what are often nicknamed 'God's lobbyists', i.e. the leaders and members of pan-European Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim organisations that are located and highly visible in Brussels. A substantial part, but not all, of the fieldwork concerning the European Commission took place between the autumn of 2001 and the end of 2004, i.e. at the heart of the consultations of the European Convention on the Future of Europe and around the 'European Constitution'.<sup>5</sup> The collection and analysis of the European Parliament materials is more recent. The information collected for both institutions has been regularly updated up to the end of 2008.

This study did not develop from any given assumption that religious actors 'should' be organised or behave in such a way in order to 'represent' a religion. In fact, my understanding of religion is much closer to a theological, Barthian definition in terms of 'faith' (Barth 1936; Kraemer 2003) rather than to sociological and anthropological explanations that emphasise collective rituals and common societal norms.

A growing concern with Islam is a central theme that emerges from the historical overview of initiatives about religion around the venue of the European Commission observed below. Hence, the second dimension

of the paper consists of an empirical study around the theme of Islam in the main output of the European Parliament during its fourth and fifth mandates, from 1994 to 1999 and from 1999 to 2004. It includes a keyword-based analysis using the terms 'Islam' (this word could identify the noun and its adjectives) and 'Muslim'. The documents examined were Parliamentary Questions (written and oral) and Committee Reports. The findings were then put into tables highlighting the date when the keywords occurred, in connection to which issue, and in relation to which European party or political group (see Table 1 in the Appendix to this article). This analysis was also complemented by examination of the main political groups' websites and manifestoes to see whether and in what circumstances they mentioned religion.

### **Religion at the European Commission**

The EU is strongly committed, through its *acquis*, to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and has increasingly become active in the fight against discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity, faith or political belief, especially since the introduction of Article 13 in the Treaty of Amsterdam and the approval of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2000.<sup>6</sup> However, this international defender of the freedom of religion has no legal competence in the day-to-day regulation of matters of faith, i.e. in each member state's practical arrangements for enabling people to worship, organise their religious community, and follow their religious practices. Nevertheless, the article gives evidence of an increasing direct involvement of the EU with Europe's faith communities – and especially with Islam – starting from the early 1990s, with the Commission's establishment of expert groups and informal meetings with representatives of faith communities to discuss the cultural and religious dimensions of European identity.

Such evolution can be explained thanks to a combination of micro and macro factors that accompanied the establishment of the EU as a global player. The internal factors include the personal charisma and biographical influences of the politicians in charge of the EC/EU in those years;<sup>7</sup> internal institutional transformations brought about by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992; and the consequences of the expansion of the EU political dimension, which implied the development of foreign policies targeted to various regions of the world, including parts of the world that are steeped in Muslim culture, such as the Mediterranean (Silvestri 2005b), the Middle East, and South-East Asia.<sup>8</sup>

External pressures include shifting priorities in the post-Cold War era; the prospect of enlargement (both Eastwards and with a view to the Turkish candidacy to the EU);<sup>9</sup> the urgent need to tackle rising immigration flows (chiefly from Muslim countries) into the EU throughout the 1990s to the present; the growing mobilisation and influence of the Christian churches on the EU scene; the global attempt, following 11 September 2001, to prevent

terrorism stemming from fundamentalist and violent-prone interpretations of Islam.

Milestones of a process of EU 'sensitisation' to religious issues and of the formation of a dedicated space within the European Commission can be detected in the output of the EU, and especially of the Commission, over the past decade. These landmarks are: Declaration no. 11, which was attached to the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 – apparently after considerable lobbying by the Christian churches – to acknowledge the existence of religious groups in the European scene and to reiterate exclusive national competence in religious affairs; the European Commission White Paper on *European Governance*, which pointed to the importance of widening civil society participation in the construction and functioning of the expanding European polity, and mentioned the useful potential contribution of faith-based groups (Commission 2001); the workings of the Convention on the Future of Europe (2002–04), which engaged in public consultations with religious groups during its plenary sessions and public hearings with civil society groups organised by the sector of competence;<sup>10</sup> the uproar, particularly intense between 2003 and 2004, concerning the Preamble of the draft European Constitutional Treaty and the possible insertion of a reference to the 'religious' roots of European integration among other cultural and historical legacies, and the subsequent public debate on the meaning of 'European' identity and values (Silvestri 2007a, 2007c); and, as of 2005, the initiation of more formalised annual meetings of the European Commission President with the leaders and representatives of the main faith communities of Europe. This is the background against which, in this section, we will examine the gradual formalisation of the European Commission's concerns and contacts with religious groups and in particular with Islam.

### *A Soul for Europe*

In 1992, the then President of the European Commission Jacques Delors said: 'If in the next ten years we haven't managed to give a Soul to Europe, to give it spirituality and meaning the game will be up' (Delors 1992). Delors is remembered for having re-kindled, during his long mandate with the Commission, the idea of European integration, by making it meaningful to the individual citizens of Europe (see Dehousse and Magnette 2002). Among the activities he promoted, Delors established the Forward Studies Unit (FSU), a sort of 'in-house think tank' directly responding to his Presidential office, and staffed by a team of EU officials, with the purpose of investigating future areas of interest for the Union. One of the FSU's tasks was to establish channels of dialogue between the EU and faith communities and other belief groups. In order to facilitate exchanges between the EU and religious and philosophical groups – and probably also in order to bypass the institutional constraints of the EU, i.e. its neutrality over religious

matters – in 1994 the ‘Soul for Europe’ (SfE) programme was also created by the Commission’s Presidency and attached to the FSU. Its task was to provide a forum for the European Commission, the European Parliament, and various representatives of religious and philosophical convictions to reflect together upon the spiritual, moral and cultural roots, as well as the future potential of Europe.<sup>11</sup>

A group of invited representatives formed the *Comité de Sélection* (‘Select Committee’, later called *Comité de Coordination*, ‘Coordination Committee’) of the ‘Soul for Europe’ and was entrusted with reflecting on the contribution of faith communities to the establishment of peace in the EU and in the rest of the world (Jansen 2000: 7–8). In 2002, the SfE initiative became an independent international non-profit association, registered in Belgium and based in the office of CEC’s Church and Society Commission<sup>12</sup> in Brussels. From there, SfE worked as a sort of ‘spiritual lobbying group’ with the EU institutions.<sup>13</sup> Although it had almost petered out by 2005, the association left a significant mark for the history of the place of religion in European public policy, as shown below.

Earlier public responses to the SfE initiative had been mixed and critical. The mission statement of the association was to ‘provide a forum for an interfaith dialogue at various levels, in relation with the European institutions’; whilst it did not aim at any ‘syncretism’, SfE also demanded that its members ‘renounce any evangelisation within the group’. Many have welcomed this opportunity for religious and other belief organisations to come to the fore and engage in the politics of Europe. However, the slogan ‘A Soul for Europe’ has not been uncontested. Intellectually, for instance, the whole idea of ‘giving a soul’ to Europe has been criticised for assuming that Europe is ‘soulless’, whereas the very courage and determination needed to accomplish the unification of Europe are living proof that Europe does have a soul already (Halik 2005). Gadamer (1991) has always spoken of a ‘spiritual unity’ of Europe as a ‘reality’ and as well as a ‘duty’, as an idea underlying human activities and emotions in Europe. For Elbe (2003: 66), on the contrary, it is in the ability to forfeit the need for a meaningful idea of Europe that we can find evidence of ‘great spiritual vitality’. Those who were involved in the early stages of the Council of Europe (CoE) tend to see this institution as the only one capable of expressing a spiritual or moral dimension, because the CoE ‘does not ask economic questions. It can appeal to the heart through the idea of the European family and it certainly has strong moral and human rights expectations’ (Coleman 1999: 22). Hence, Coleman (1999: 22) argues, we should turn towards the CoE ‘to find the soul of Europe’. On a more political and polemical front, SfE was regarded with suspicion by a London-based Conservative Eurosceptic group that condemned the secrecy and unaccountability of the EU and its ‘propagandist use of Europe’s Churches’ (Eardley n.d.).

As these examples illustrate, the rejection of the SfE idea and initiative was widespread and rooted in very diverse ideological soils. However, the

recent revival of EU attention to religious issues within the overarching theme of intercultural dialogue may have shifted opinions. A CEC briefing paper on EU engagement in intercultural dialogue noted with regret that a new NGO bearing the name SfE, which however has nothing to do with the earlier ecumenical effort, is quickly attracting EU interest and ‘filling a gap’, thus indicating that perhaps the ‘decision to close down the churches’ activity under this heading was premature’ (CEC 2007).

### *Intercultural Dialogue as Attention to Islam*

One of the apparent central preoccupations of the FSU was the integration of Muslims in Europe. In the late 1990s, a major research project on ‘The Presence of Muslim Communities in the Union and the future of European Society’ was requested by the Commission, with the support of the European Parliament, to a group of internationally renowned European social scientists. Its aim was to establish not only the number and the demographic profile of Muslims living in the EU, but also their attitudes and practices. According to insiders of the European Commission External Relations Directorate, ‘the research project [was] intended strictly as an academic endeavour, and not designed to lead to any policy-making’, at least in its initial stage; a ‘sub-aim’ was ‘to create a network of researchers and scholars that would get to know each other and work cooperatively on the issue of Muslim communities in Europe’ (Fogelstroem and Köhler 2000: 237). That report demonstrated that ‘there is a multitude of aspects to Muslim integration in Europe’ which are affecting policy-making in various areas. In those years EU officials were becoming gradually aware that ‘one can no longer take an isolated view on the integration question. Rather it has to be considered on all levels including external relations’ (Fogelstroem and Köhler 2000: 237). However, despite this perception that substantial and innovative piece of research was neither officially released by the European Commission, nor circulated amongst the Directorates and Cabinets that could have had a potential interest in the subject matter. The importance of this comparative research<sup>14</sup> has since been widely acknowledged by the academic community, as a comprehensive and relatively up-to-date source of reference on Islam in contemporary Europe; however it remains less well known among EU policy-makers, who regularly look for information on issues pertaining Islam in Europe.

Attention to the place of religious identities and of faith-based civil society actors, both in the internal and in the external dimension of European integration, has been a central but semi-apparent theme running through EU discussions of intercultural dialogue. In the mid 1990s the FSU started off by promoting conferences to study the impact of the ‘religious factor’ in Europe and the challenges for the Abrahamic faiths in the Mediterranean region and to develop an alternative paradigm to the ‘Clash of Civilisations’ (Luyckx 2000; Huntington 1998; Silvestri 2005b). In the

decade bridging the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the EU intercultural dialogue appears to have evolved as a major narrative, as a resource aimed at reviving the sense of European integration and of a 'citizens' Europe', by moving beyond the EU's primary economic features and the 'hard' side of politics.

Intercultural dialogue was initially defined with the *Barcelona Declaration* of 1995 as a socio-cultural strategy that would accompany and complement the intensification of economic and political exchanges planned between the South and the North shores of the Mediterranean (Euro-Mediterranean Conference 1995). Critics have interpreted this 'third basket' of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as just a PR move to counterbalance simultaneous controversial anti-immigration EU policies. Later intercultural dialogue was understood instrumentally as one of the possible methods that could effectively integrate migrants and prevent radicalisation, as explained in the two Communications of the European Commissions of September 2005 (Commission 2005b; 2005c) and as implied in the meeting with religious leaders that the President of the European Commission convened in July 2005 (see below).

#### *Faith-based Dialogue after the 'Soul for Europe'*

Upon becoming Commission President in 1999, Romano Prodi began an internal restructuring of the European Commission. The FSU was moved to the General Secretariat of the Commission (although it kept working for the President), was renamed 'Group of Policy Advisors' (GOPA), and was entrusted with dealing specifically with four domains: economics, social affairs, foreign affairs, and dialogue with religions. In turn, GOPA generated three High Level Advisory Groups to reflect on the values and cultural and religious heritage of Europe (see Silvestri 2005b, 2007d).

With the arrival of José Manuel Barroso to the European Commission Presidency in 2004, the main ideas of having a group of dedicated advisers and of continuing Commission initiatives in relation to faith issues were maintained. However, in reshuffling GOPA and constituting a new similar body, called Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), the areas of concern were reduced to three (political, economic and social issues), and the previous GOPA chapter specifically devoted to dialogue with communities of faith and philosophical beliefs was deleted from the headings, though a person was appointed to deal with it. So, the purpose of BEPA remained the same as that of its predecessors and 'dialogue with communities of faith and conviction' reappeared instead of being absorbed within the various issues covered by the political chapter of BEPA. At the same time, Barroso also inaugurated, in 2005, a series of official closed-door annual meetings with the leaders and key members of the religious communities of Europe (Commission 2005a). Meetings of such a nature already existed under his predecessors – who even attempted in 1997 to

create a pan-European Muslim council (see Silvestri 2007d) – but were less official, not advertised publicly, and mostly managed by the Soul for Europe network. Barroso went a step further than his predecessor by making these meetings more formal and by opening them up to the participation of the leaders of the other two political institutions of the EU, the Council and the Parliament.

A certain political opportunism (i.e. timeliness and calculations), concerning the decision of Barroso – and probably of the majority of his college of Commissioners – to pull his weight on the issue of religion can be detected in the fact that the first big meeting that he promoted with faith groups in Brussels took place a few days after the bombing of the London underground on 7 July 2005. As a consequence, the initiative sounded pretty much like an emergency response. Nevertheless, from a holistic point of view, and putting aside the personal issues at stake with each Commissioner, it is important to mark how the EU, in the course of the past two decades or so, has gradually shifted from informal practices of dialogue with and about faith groups to a more ‘structured dialogue’ that in turn becomes a sort of semi-formal ‘policy towards religion’ (Silvestri 2007d).

Yet this policy is in an ‘embryonic’ stage. It is not clear whether its focus is on the ‘venue’ (i.e. the platform opened by and in the Commission) or on the ‘subject’ (i.e. religion). We may also wonder whether attention to religion stems from appreciation, on the part of the EU institutions, of the values and ideas at the heart of the different faiths and the potential social force enshrined in them, or, instead, of the ‘political actors’ (i.e. organised religions and the religious lobbies) and the mutual legitimacy game at stake. Moreover, the different – somewhat ambiguous – approach to religious affairs adopted by Barroso in contrast to his predecessors reveals the discretionary power of the Commission President in bringing religion on to the agenda even when formal venues for discussing this topic have been established. In turn, these considerations indicate that the EU remains attached to a secular line of thinking that is not only distant from, but actually suspicious of, organised religion and the power of faith.

#### *Understanding Change and Consolidation of Practices in the Commission vis-à-vis Religion and Islam*

The developments concerning the appreciation of religious issues in the EU and the establishment of links with faith-based actors through the European Commission also indicate that the ‘practice’ and the ‘necessity’ of dealing with faith matters and with living religious communities have gradually ‘imposed themselves’, in an environment that institutionally, politically (often due to divisions between left and right), and from a legal perspective, is not supposed and/or easily willing to deal with these issues. The gradual spread of informal practices that eventually become codified through laws and institutions is a frequent feature of institutional evolution in the EU (see

Olsen 2002). The development that we have observed above in relation to the Commission's engagement with religions appears therefore as a path-dependent consequence (see Pierson 1999) of a number of concomitant factors that interacted over time: strategic choices of individual actors (e.g. views of EU officials, continuous lobbying of certain religious groups, political constraints or interests put forth by parties and governments), key moments of institutional transformation (e.g. Treaty reforms), and various external events (themselves being also 'critical junctures') impacting on the – relatively weak – framework of dialogue with faith groups initially set up by Delors almost two decades ago. Of course one could argue that the initiatives listed above were very much the outcome of particular views that former European Commission President Jacques Delors and his successors (Santer and in particular Prodi) had about European integration; this was also related to their appreciation of the moral drives and the Christian Democratic ideals that had inspired the founders of the European Communities (see Hix and Lord 1997; Dehousse and Magnette 2002). However, if we note that Delors was actually a member of the Socialist Party, and a French citizen familiar with the notion of *laïcité*, his choice to engage with religion in the public sphere appears at loggerheads with the attitude of several members of the Socialist Party in France and across Europe. Especially in France, Spain, and Portugal, Socialist groups have been somewhat hostile to the interference of religious actors – in particular of the Catholic Church – with the public sphere. Similarly, although José Manuel Barroso, when Prime Minister, entered in a coalition between the Social Democrats (his own party) and the Portuguese People's Party, his political past (including involvement in a Marxist group) does not fully explain his support for grand-scale initiatives regarding religion since becoming President of the European Commission.

A more complex but perhaps more exhaustive multi-level explanation, that takes into account path dependency, socialisation processes and traditional security concerns, could be found in the inter-linkage of a series of other possible reasons and sub-themes. First, in the decade or so preceding Barroso's arrival in Brussels, certain practices of dialogue were established that opened up space for faith-based groups to operate in Brussels. So, closing down these spaces would have caused more damage than benefit for the image of the EU, a *sui generis* regional organisation and international polity that seeks to establish and reinforce its legitimacy by engaging in dialogic relations with partners and neighbours.

Second, these faith-based lobbies had in the meantime acquired – also through their inclusion in the Convention consultations – considerable power and visibility in Brussels. They achieved this profile thanks to the skills and knowledge they had gradually acquired about the workings of the EU, access to information, access to EU officials, and elaboration of suitable strategies of communication. This is particularly true of the offices of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and of the

other Christian churches (represented by CEC), which have since visibly improved their websites and press offices, and have intensified collaboration with each other. Although no Muslim group participated in the Convention, three Muslim organisations have since improved their outreach work and visibility in Brussels (Silvestri 2006, 2009).

Third, Barroso entered his mandate at a crucial historical moment, when concern with Islam had expanded globally, essentially due to two reasons: a) the opening of EU accession negotiations with Turkey – a secular state whose population is predominantly Muslim and whose then-government (still in power at the time of publication) had ties with Islamist ideas and previous political formations; b) the fear produced by terrorist attacks carried out in the US and in Europe between 2001 and 2005 by groups that claimed legitimisation in Islamic doctrine and history. Therefore it was politically opportune, both in the interest of the EU institutions and for Barroso's personal image, to seize his predecessors' programme on religion and push it forward.

Fourth, and finally, the peculiar character of EU institutions – and of the Commission in particular – should be taken into account. Change is a quasi-permanent process in the EU; moreover, new policies have often simply 'imposed themselves' onto EU institutions, which are rather 'adaptable' bodies (see Dehousse and Magnette 2002; Olsen 2002). In addition, the Commission is renowned for its tendency to seek compromises – among its Commissioners, with other EU institutions, with external partners, and with candidate or neighbouring countries. Despite receiving constant criticism about its slow administrative machine, the Commission has nevertheless also been commended for its role of 'policy entrepreneur', its autonomy, and for its ability to 'soften up' its policy interlocutors and thus be able to sell them effectively 'new ideas' (see Dehousse and Magnette 2002; Egeberg 2003; Pollack 2003).

### **Religion and Islam at the European Parliament**

As far as the European Parliament, with its transnational political parties and groups, is concerned, it is interesting to note that religion has been an important 'European' matter for basically all political groups. Religious identity (Christianity) features explicitly in the names of many political parties that are part of the largest transnational grouping in the Parliament, the European People's Party/European Democrats (EPP-ED). This is the only political group that has a section 'Politics and Religion' mentioned on its website, under the list of activities and policy areas.<sup>15</sup> Seminars on Islam, Christianity, and interfaith and intercultural meetings are listed in the group's activities dating back to 2002. EPP member Hans-Gert Pöttering – the European Parliament President until mid 2009 – has always been a strong proponent of dialogue with faith groups (see Pöttering 2002). Also, Thomas Jansen, an important figure involved with the FSU, in his youth had been Secretary-General of the EPP.<sup>16</sup>

Other political groups too have recently (approximately since 1997, see Silvestri 2006) shown sensitivity to the topic of religion, even though ideologically they are explicitly pro-secularism in a rather anti-clerical fashion.<sup>17</sup> The main obvious reason that appears to create trans-European cohesion around the issue of religion is the strongly rooted awareness that the EU promotes Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and that, consequently, it should protect freedom of religion. This explains why the analysis of the Parliamentary Questions indicates that the themes of religion and Islam came up in the European Parliament largely in relation to the issue of freedom of religion and of conscience: 25 out of the 36 texts that were analysed focused on this issue (see Table 1). Of the remaining questions that emerged – still in relation to the theme of Islam – three covered gender relations in Muslim-majority countries and, more specifically, referred to the problem of ‘honour crimes’ in Turkey and to the situation of women in Afghanistan and in the Arab-Muslim countries.<sup>18</sup> These questions were put forward, respectively, by members of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament (official acronym: PSE), the Union for Europe of the Nations group (UEN), and the United Left (GUE-NGL). It is striking to note the similarity of the concerns (and the formulation of these concerns) of such diverging political groups about the submission of women in Muslim societies. Once again, this could either indicate that the parties are held together by a shared belief in the ‘European values’<sup>19</sup> of equality, fundamental freedoms, and human rights, or because they are sharing similar understandings of the role of religion and of the position of women in Muslim societies.

Another three Parliamentary Questions that came up in connection with the keywords ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ were about Islamic radicalism and extremism. The most virulent one, exposing the supposed ‘radical threat’ posed by a well-known, but often contested Muslim scholar who lives and works in Europe, Tariq Ramadan, was put forth by an Italian member of the UEN group.<sup>20</sup> The other two questions were by members of the PPE/DE. At first glance, from this particular case, it might seem that concern about Islamist-based extremism and prejudice against Tariq Ramadan are salient issues dividing the right and centre-right from the left in the European Parliament. However, we should remember that similar views could actually be found also in some corners of the PSE, because, as shown below, the group suffers from an internal split – mainly between its French and non-French members – concerning opinions about Mr Ramadan and the opportunity to deal with Islam in the Parliament.

In the time-span analysed, a readiness to campaign for the rights of religious minorities emerged across all parties of the European Parliament. However, it is also interesting to note that the documents examined referred mainly to the need to mobilise in order to protect the rights of Christian minorities in Muslim-majority countries – like Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Indonesia – whereas the situation of Muslims living in Europe was not touched on, except for three questions put forth between 2002 and 2004: the

above-mentioned attack on Tariq Ramadan's influence in Europe, concerns about a radical Muslim preacher who was released from prison in the Netherlands, and a critique of Saudi Arabian influence in Europe.

Members of the Greens/Free Alliance group and of the PSE have often promoted, both prior to and after 9/11, awareness of Islam and relationships with Muslim associations, including those that have established themselves as pressure groups in Brussels (e.g. FIOE, Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations, FEMYSO), over the past decade (Silvestri 2006, 2010). In these two political groups, MEPs who have been particularly active on this front have been a handful of individuals coming from Germany, Holland, the UK, and Italy. Within the PSE a split emerged between most of its French members and the rest of the group, in the context of a series of seminars on the themes of EU relations with the Middle East and on Muslims in contemporary Europe organised by the PSE in Brussels between 2007 and 2008. The French members' opposition to these initiatives was based on two reasons: 1) they regarded as inappropriate dealing with these themes in a public institution such as the European Parliament; 2) they resented the invitation to Tariq Ramadan to be as a guest speaker in one of the initial meetings.<sup>21</sup> In general, a tendency towards a Muslim-friendly attitude is apparent among the European green and left-wing parties, who nevertheless appear to hold a rather ambiguous – at times aggressive – position towards religion and Catholics, as the Buttiglione affair showed.<sup>22</sup>

It is quite interesting to note that, overall, the issue of Islam in Parliamentary Questions almost always came up in relation to situations that are *external* to the EU, and not the day-to-day engagement with faith issues and with religious communities *within* the EU borders. Only one of the 36 texts analysed pointed to the EU's 'internal' relations with religion. This question of June 2003 was put by a member of the Alliance of the Liberals and Democrats for Europe group (ALDE) and fiercely attacked the then Commission President. It accused him of trying to impose his own particular (pro-religion) view about the opportunity to insert a reference to the religious or spiritual roots of Europe in the preamble of the Constitutional draft treaty. Finally, only two questions concerned conflict areas of the Middle East that involve Muslims and faith communities. One question, by a member of the Christian Democrats, in November 2000, requested a comment on the possibility of solving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict by establishing Jerusalem as an international city; the other question, in 1997 by a member of the UEN group, inquired about relations with Iran and how best to respond to Iran's accusation of being the prey of a Zionist plot.

The European Parliament Minutes analysed for the same period, 1994–2004, resulted in little information. The only items of note are that mention of religion and Islam happened mainly in relation to the issue of freedom of religion in countries outside the EU, a subject that featured prominently also in the Parliamentary Questions. Reference to religion in relation to the internal dimension of the EU was absent except for a motion for

a resolution, in September 2003, on respect for the principles of religious freedom and the secular nature of the state in the draft Constitutional Treaty, and for some concerns raised by a UEN MEP in September 2004 about a European council of Islamic communities.

Between 1994 and 2004, 21 reports were produced in the European Parliament that dealt with issues connected with the theme of Islam. Once again, a considerable amount of the material centred on the lack of freedom of religion in totalitarian and Muslim majority countries. Seven reports dealt with the problem of Islamic fundamentalism-radicalism (the two terms were associated and used synonymously). Some looked at the spread of Islamism in foreign countries (such as Iran, South-East Asia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan) and the implications for the protection of Human Rights there.<sup>23</sup>

Arie Oostlander's (2003) report on *Turkey's Application for Membership of the European Union* welcomed Turkey's candidacy arguing that

the political values of the European Union are chiefly based on the Judaeo-Christian and humanist culture of Europe, but that no-one has a monopoly on these universal values of democracy, the rule of law, human and minority rights and freedoms of religions and conscience which can perfectly well be accepted and defended by a country where the majority of the population is Islamic.

It then continued by suggesting that 'a relaxed attitude to Islam and to religion in general will counteract the rise of antidemocratic movements such as intolerant and violent religious extremism'.

Five of the reports analysed dealt with women and Islam, mainly focusing on their unequal treatment in Muslim-majority countries, like Afghanistan or Iran. One of these reports, however, also stressed the crucial contribution and involvement of women in Islamist networks. Cornillet's (2001) Report on Fundamental Rights provided an overview of the treatment of religious clothing in various European countries.

Finally, two important reports came out in 1997 and in 1998. The former (Ali 1997) focused on *Islam and European Averroës Day* and suggested an overarching intercultural approach for the EU to deal with Muslim countries and also to promote European scholarship on Islam and *ijtihad* (interpretation of the holy Islamic scriptures) by founding a 'Euro-Islamic university'. The other significant item was Oostlander's (1998) report on the challenge of fundamentalism.<sup>24</sup> The document argued that

Islamic fundamentalism could become more attractive to European Muslims because of a lack of socio-economic and social prospects, the stereotyped image of Islam and Muslims in the Western media, limited public recognition of the socio-economic and social contribution which Muslims are making and have made to European society, the appointment of spiritual leaders who lack proper knowledge of

European society and have difficulty in finding their place in it, and because of persistent legal and practical obstacles to compliance with religious obligations.

It therefore recommended a mixed approach: 1) intelligence and security services should be 'alert to all forms of violent religious fundamentalism'; 2) 'Islam should be granted rights similar to those granted to the religions already recognized in the EU countries, especially in terms of education and religious rites'; 3) the member states and the Commission should look into 'the possibilities of supporting academic research centres for Islamic studies, which can meet the need for spiritual leaders trained in a European context'; 4) it called for an assessment of the seriousness of the problem of religious fundamentalism as it emerges from various faith traditions; 5) the Council and Commission should promote a 'comparative study of the position of Islam and Muslim organizations in the various Member States, which should consider, *inter alia*: the official status of Islam, existing arrangements for compliance with religious obligations (religious holidays, ritual slaughter, funeral ceremonies), the construction of religious buildings, and educational and cultural facilities, and to disseminate the study widely in the EU'.

The themes addressed by these reports coincide more or less with those that had emerged from the Parliamentary Questions. The issue of 'Islamic radicalism/fundamentalism'<sup>25</sup> appeared more strongly than others in the reports, and it is interesting to note that it emerged in conjunction with important moments connected with Turkey's application for membership of the EU. The pre-accession strategy for Turkey was approved by the Council in 1998 and a series of progress reports on Turkey were produced in the following years, until the Commission, in October 2004, produced a Recommendation confirming that Turkey had met the political criteria sufficiently to begin accession negotiations.

Another significant issue emerging from these reports is that an attempt to develop a holistic EU approach to Islam appeared already years before the terrorist attacks of September 2001, March 2004, and July 2005 triggered a series of security but also socio-cultural initiatives concerning Europe's Muslim communities. The Parliament documents of the pre- 11 September 2001 period further developed the Commission idea of intercultural dialogue shaped around 1995. The Oostlander (1998) and Ali (1997) reports presented it as an instrument aimed at undermining radical/fundamentalist approaches whilst improving living conditions and engaging in scholarly and socio-cultural exchanges with the Muslim populations that reside within and outside the borders of the EU.

## Conclusions

Despite the narrow definition of competences of the EU in the ambit of religious affairs, this article shows that things have been moving, though

slowly, in a new direction. For a start, the EU's recurring attention to and insistence on the protection of religious freedom and the rights of ethno-religious minorities has to be acknowledged, especially in the post-Amsterdam context.

The informal practices initiated by the Commission in the early 1990s, also under the impact of external events that drew global attention to the risk of political violence and radicalisation stemming from faith-based circles, have developed along a path that has gradually become formalised around the notion of 'intercultural dialogue'. In pursuing this, the Commission has managed – intentionally or not – to 'lock in' other institutions, such as the Parliament and the Council, for instance by bringing religion to their attention in the year of intercultural dialogue, or by inviting them to participate in its consultations with faith groups. Overall, the increasing empowerment of the Parliament and of the Commission of the post-Maastricht era indirectly contributed to transforming these institutions into two important venues of encounter with faith groups, a transformation which in turn, in the long term, might trigger further institutional change, further interest in the normative power of the EU, and possibly also the production of a renewed meaning for European integration.

Whereas Commission documents have stressed the positive potential contribution of faith communities for a better, more cohesive, and more just Europe, examination of the Parliamentary documents indicates that this and other faiths were mainly discussed in problematic contexts where one religion appears to impede the free expression of other faith identities, as well as the equal treatment of individuals. Moreover, the Parliament's concern with Islam and religion has emerged less in relation to the internal context of the EU, and more in relation to the outside world. The tone and presentation of the documents analysed show that religion in general, and Islam more specifically, is perceived simultaneously as the object of or as a source of constraint upon individual freedom. Nevertheless when it comes to examining the material coming from the President of the European Parliament, these tensions disappear into optimistic speeches encouraging dialogue.

The discrepancy of language and attitudes that transpire from the study of materials and initiatives coming from these two EU institutions can therefore be explained through the different voices that the Commission and the Parliament are supposed to and do represent: the voice of political compromise that tries to accommodate tensions diplomatically, and the voice of the people, the Parliament, that, despite an undeniable process of socialisation into Euro-speak and Euro-behaviour, is still able to project debates and concerns of the *demos*, of the wider European and national public sphere.

This comparative analysis of select Parliamentary documents is the beginning of an innovative and larger investigation. This study allows us to start to penetrate the complexities of the MEPs' positions about religion and Europe. A problem that remains for the observer is to try and understand if

and why more issues pertaining Islam or other faiths were *not* discussed in the Parliament.<sup>26</sup> One general comment that we are able to make though is this: the growing political power of the Parliament that derived from a series of EU reforms in the 1990s also enabled the Parliament to acquire more visibility and to serve as a venue for a number of events of mutual concern organised by or with public interest lobbying groups (Greenwood 2003). The Parliament has therefore also been able to gradually host meetings with new typologies of lobbyists, the faith-based ones. Examples of this are the Christian churches' series of meetings on dialogue (in and about Europe between Jews, Muslims and Christians) that was cited at the beginning of this article, and the establishment, in the late 1990s, of EU-focused Muslim advocacy groups and transnational networks that have relied on the interests of groups like the Greens and the Socialists to gain access to and visibility in the EU (see Silvestri 2006).

The perpetration of practices and the steady intensification of multi-level activities concerning Islam, religion, and intercultural dialogue in the political system of the EU that were observed in this paper seem to confirm the gradual establishment of an embryonic framework for a potential 'EU policy towards religion'. Both the Parliament and the Commission have become informal venues for institutional dialogue between faith groups and the evolving EU system. Muslim groups and individuals as well as Islamic movements in particular, having experienced difficulties in carving out their own space in European countries that did not provide appropriate structures for the accommodation of Islam, could be the first to benefit explicitly from this transnational European platform of engagement with religion, and some have already started. Whatever the causes that provoked this transformation – this EU opening to faith issues and faith groups – the outcome seems to indicate that the EU has slowly woken up from its schizophrenic attitude towards religion deriving from a rigid, almost fundamentalist, conceptualisation of secularism in opposition to religion.

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### **Notes**

1. The document advertising these events used these very same words and did not provide the exact names of the Muslim institutions or individuals involved. See COMECE-CSC-KAS (2008).

2. By 'European' organisations we mean both those based and working in individual European countries and those that are present in Brussels and operate at a trans-European level.
3. The Treaty of Lisbon amends the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community. Although signed by the EU member states in December 2007, the Lisbon Treaty will not apply until and unless it is ratified by each of the EU's 27 members. The treaty version consulted for this article was 'Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union', *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 115, 9 May 2008.
4. For a review of the Italian contribution to the EU elaboration of its position vis-à-vis religion and Islam, for instance, see Silvestri (2005a).
5. This part of the research was conducted with the precious collaboration of Dr Silvia Lauzzana, whom I should like to thank.
6. Two important directives derived from Article 13: *Council Directive 2000/43/EC prohibiting racial and ethnic discrimination in employment, education, social security and healthcare, access to goods and services and housing*, of 29 June 2000, and *Council Directive 2000/78/EC prohibiting discrimination in employment on grounds of religion and belief, disability, age and sexual orientation*, 27 November 2000. In July 2008 the European Commission put forth a significant new directive proposal that urges to extend those anti-discrimination measures to contexts beyond the workplace (Commission 2008).
7. Think in particular of Jacques Delors' vital role, already in the 1980s, in promoting informal rounds of consultations between EC officials and religious groups.
8. European Political Cooperation (EPC) had already been involved in some of these regions but the creation of Pillar II with Maastricht enabled the EU member states to better develop and coordinate initiatives in the field of foreign affairs and defence.
9. Key periods when Turkey was in Europe's spotlight were 1997–98, when the European Strategy on Turkey was prepared and adopted, and 2004–05, when Turkey was given the 'green light' to enter into negotiations with the EU.
10. Since there was no specific chapter in the Convention to discuss religious issues *per se*, the churches (and other organised religious and belief groups) were invited to offer their contribution by joining civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), within the general theme of 'culture', but never as 'churches' or under the heading 'religion' (see Prisciandaro and Silvestri 2002: 55). This consultation mechanism put religious groups in the position to adopt multiple discourses in order to express their concerns and be heard.
11. The criteria for selecting religious and belief groups – and whom and how they should 'represent' – were never properly defined. The selection was probably based on the groups 'self-perception' and through institutionally 'ascribed' roles. Similarly, the role these religious actors should play in those meetings was unclear. For instance, should they just provide an abstract 'spiritual' insight into broad EU discussions or would they be allowed to make 'political' statements and demands derived from their religious values?
12. This is the main representative body for Europe's Protestant and Orthodox churches and also includes the Old Catholic Church.
13. See *A Soul for Europe. Ethics and Spirituality*, European Commission Policy Advisers' website: <http://www.europa.eu.int> (accessed 3 May 2005. NB: the EU website has since changed into <http://www.europa.eu>). Also see paragraph 'A Soul for Europe' in 'Dialogue with other Religions' section of COMECE website, <http://www.comece.org> (accessed 6 April 2005).
14. This research was published independently in Dassetto *et al.* (2001) and in Maréchal *et al.* (2003).
15. <http://www.epp-ed.eu> (accessed repeatedly in 2008). Curiously, the website's 2009 version no longer includes a direct link to the page called 'Politics and Religion' (which still exists but is more difficult to access). Instead, many activities pertaining to religion feature in the rubric 'Intercultural Dialogue', see <http://www.epp-ed.eu> (accessed 4 February 2009).

16. See EPP party chronology on the party webpage: <http://www.epp.eu> (accessed 4 February 2009).
17. All European parties are 'secular' if by this term we mean the basic Western feature of separation between state and church/religious establishments.
18. An additional question also tackled the issue of female clergy in Europe.
19. NB: I deliberately use the expression 'European values' not to argue that Human Rights, Fundamental Freedoms etc. are a historical or moral 'property' of Europe. Instead, I try to suggest that the shared understanding – among European political parties, state bureaucracies, EU institutions, and individuals – that is at the heart of the political and legal construction of the contemporary political system of the EU 'makes' them 'European'.
20. Ramadan is a controversial figure in Europe and in the Muslim world. A high-flying Muslim intellectual in his forties, from an Egyptian family, brought up and educated in Europe, he has become famous for pursuing an independent understanding of Islam from the point of view and the experiences of Muslims living in Europe. Ramadan has become a charismatic figure among Europe's Muslim youth, a supporter of European integration, and an excellent communicator with diverse audiences, constantly invited to conferences, TV and radio programmes around the world. He was also invited by the European Commission to join one of the high-level working groups mentioned above; the Parliamentary Question discussed above was especially concerned with this. Ramadan's sophisticated discourse and also the fact that his family of origin has strong ties with the historical founder of the Muslim Brothers Al Banna has made him a figure hailed by some and hated by others, who consider him a 'double-talker', a 'wolf in sheep's clothing'. For a view of Tariq Ramadan's own work see Ramadan (2004); for an opposing voice, see Fourest (2008).
21. Source: conversations with (non-French) MEPs and other European Parliament officials, in Brussels, between December 2007 and April 2008. On Ramadan see previous note.
22. An Italian politician of the centre-right Berlusconi coalition who used to be a prominent member of the Christian Democrats, in 2004 Buttiglione was put forth as candidate Commissioner for Justice Liberty and Security but was rejected by the European Parliament on accusation on the part of the left that he held fundamentalist and undemocratic views due to the position of his Catholic religion – which he did not deny when questioned in a public hearing – concerning homosexuality.
23. Of particular relevance is Bob van den Bos' Report of 16 July 2003 (Annual report on human rights in the world in 2002 and European Union's human rights policy – Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy). Whilst warning against the spread of Islamist fundamentalism it also called for the EU to promote exchanges with Islamic scholars to clarify issues of concern and to prevent conflicts with religious and cultural dimensions.
24. By Arie Oostlander, on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs, 29 April 1998.
25. The author of this article prefers to use the term 'Islamist' radicalism instead of the very generic adjective 'Islamic'. However, here we reproduced the term 'Islamic' as this is the term that appears in the European Parliament material that was examined.
26. From a preliminary look at the material of the 2004–09 mandate of the European Parliament it seems that issues such as faith-based discrimination did gain prominence compared to the issues treated in the previous mandate.

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## Appendix

TABLE 1A  
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS (ORAL AND WRITTEN), CONTAINING KEYWORDS 'ISLAM' AND 'MUSLIM',  
BY THEME

Date	Subtheme > Political group	Human rights and fundamental freedoms		Women's rights	Islamic fundamentalism in EU	Religion and EU	Middle East
		Freedom religion	Freedom speech/ political belief				
18-Mar-04	PSE	Religious freedom, Christians, Indonesia					
03-Mar-04	PSE	Religious freedom, Ahmad, Bangladesh					
16-Feb-04	UEN				Criticism of invite of 'radical' Tariq Ramadan		
10-Feb-04	PSE		Freedom of speech, Pakistan				
15-Jan-04	Greens	Religious freedom/ human rights, Christians, Jordan					
16-Jan-04	ALDE		Persecution of Uighur, China				
29-Oct-03	PSE	Religious freedom, Christians, Pakistan					
18-Sep-03	PPE/DE	Religious freedom, persecution of Christians, Egypt					
10-Jul-03	UEN	Religious freedom and freedom of speech, Turkey	Religious freedom and freedom of speech, Turkey				
27-Jun-03	ALDE						Preamble of EU Constitution: criticism of Mr Prodi's views
12-Jun-03	PSE	Religious freedom, persecution of Christians, Egypt					

(continued)

TABLE 1A  
(Continued)

Date	Question theme Subtheme > Political group	Human rights and fundamental freedoms		Women's rights	Islamic fundamentalism in EU	Religion and EU	Middle East
		Freedom religion	Freedom speech/ political belief				
24-Mar-03	PPE/DE				Release extremist preacher by NL		
04-Nov-03	PPE/DE Oral Question, Commission	Religious freedom and democracy in new Afghan constitution	Religious freedom and democracy in new Afghan constitution				
04-Mar-03	ALDE	Freedom of speech and religion vs fundamentalism, Tunisia	Freedom of speech and religion vs fundamentalism, Tunisia				
05-Jun-03	PPE/DE Oral Question, Council				Saudi Arabia disseminates extremism everywhere		
29-Nov-02	ALDE	Religious freedom, persecution of Christians, Egypt					
27-Jun-02	PSE	Religious freedom, Christians, Indonesia					
24-Jun-02	Greens	Religious freedom, Christians, Indonesia					
27-Feb-02	PPE/DE	Persecution of ethnic Greeks in Turkey	Persecution of ethnic Greeks in Turkey				Criticism of Bolkenstein's anti-Islamic views
17-Oct-01	GUE-NGL						
06-Jul-01	PPE/DE			Male/female clergy, position women EU			

(continued)

TABLE 1A  
(Continued)

Date	Question theme Subtheme > Political group	Human rights and fundamental freedoms			Religion and EU	Middle East
		Freedom religion	Freedom speech/ political belief	Women's rights		
28-Jun-01	ELDR/ALDE	Religious freedom, Christians, Indonesia				
04-Oct-01	PPE/DE OralQ, Coun.	Religious freedom, apostasy, Afghanistan				
13-Sep-01	PPE/DE OralQ, Comm.	Religious freedom, Christians, Afghanistan				
13-Nov-00	PPE/DE					Role EU Palestine/ Israel peace, Jerusalem as international city
03-May-00	PPE/DE	Religious freedom, Christians, Egypt				
16-Nov-00	ALDE OralQ, Comm.	Freedom of religion and opinion, WAFA in Algeria	Freedom of religion and opinion, WAFA in Algeria			
19-Oct-00	PSE OralQ, Comm.			Honour crimes in Turkey		
01-Dec-98	UPE (UEN)				Euronews mis-portrays Church of Greece	
18-Sep-98	PPE	Religious freedom, persecution of Baha I, Iran				
01-Sep-98	PSE	Religious freedom, persecution of Christians, Sudan				
31-Oct-97	UEN		Human rights violations and impositions on women, Afghanistan			

(continued)

TABLE 1A  
(Continued)

Date	Question theme		Human rights and fundamental freedoms				Religion and EU	Middle East
	Subtheme > Political group	Freedom religion	Freedom speech/ political belief	Women's rights	Islamic fundamentalism in EU	Religion and EU		
17-Mar-97	UPE (UEN)							What EU policy towards Iran and Zionism?
22-Nov-96	PPE & EDN	Religious freedom, Christians, Iran						
03-Jul-96	EDN (ID)	Religious freedom, Morocco						
06-Jul-96	GUE-NGL			Women's rights in Arab-Muslim countries				
Number of questions by topic		22	3	3	3	3	3	2

Note: Time-span: 4th and 5th European Parliament mandates, 1994-99 and 1999-2004.  
Source: Compiled by the author.

TABLE 1B  
 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, NUMBER OF PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS (ORAL  
 AND WRITTEN), CONTAINING KEYWORDS 'ISLAM' AND 'MUSLIM',  
 BY POLITICAL GROUP

Political group	Number of questions (by political group)	Notes	Themes
<b>PSE</b>	8	Includes 1 oral question	8 Fundamental Freedoms/Human Rights (of which 6 on religious freedom)
<b>UEN</b>	5		1 religious freedom & Human Rights, 1 Islamic radicalism, 1 religion in the EU, 1 Iran, 1 Human Rights & women
<b>PPE/DE</b>	12	Includes 4 oral q. & 1 shared with EDN	8 religious freedom, 2 Islamic radicalism, 1 women, 1 ME
<b>ALDE</b>	6	Includes 1 oral q.	5 religious freedom & HR, 1 religion in UE
<b>GUE-NGL</b>	2		1 anti-discrimination, 1 women
<b>Greens</b>	2		2 religious freedom
<b>EDN/ ID</b>	2	Includes 1 shared with PPE	2 religious freedom & HR

*Note:* Time-span: 4th and 5th European Parliament mandates, 1994–99 and 1999–2004.