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**The Future of Europe: Our Challenges as Europeans and our Solutions**

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**In 2005, Dr. Hellyer was nominated as Deputy Convenor of the UK Government's working group on 'Tackling Extremism and Radicalisation' in the aftermath of the bombings in London on the 7<sup>th</sup> July. He writes and speaks in academic and public forums on Muslim world-West relations, Muslims in the West, and multiculturalism. In his latest book to be published by Edinburgh University Press in 2008, 'The Other European', he argues that Muslim communities should work to be integral to, rather than simply integrated parts of, Europe, and that Europe must come to terms with all of her history.**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman for that introduction. Mr Chairman, your Excellencies, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen: thank you for inviting me to speak here today. From the outset, if I may express my thanks and gratitude to the OSCE Spanish Chairmanship for inviting me here today; in particular, el-Senor Enrique Asorey and his staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for extending the invitation and making the trip so straightforward. Official delegations from the 67 OSCE participating states and partners, along with representatives of Non Governmental Organizations makes for an illustrious audience indeed for me to address. The place itself, the city of Cordoba, founded by the ancient Roman Claudius Marcellus, has seen more of its share of illustrious audiences, in various languages and of diverse cultures. It is befitting indeed that this town, the capital of the medieval Qurtubah Caliphate (and what a word to say in our modern political climate), host our discussions. It was here that the famous Averroes of Muslim lore, and the Jewish physician & philosopher, Maimonides, were born; mystics, such as Ibn 'Arabi and Abu Madyan, who spawned some of the most well known Sufi brotherhoods in the Muslim world, were also born in this region, among many, many other illustrious Cordobans. For centuries, both during its own time and after, Cordoba served as a model of successful diversity within commonality;

lessons we failed to sustain, to our own detriment, but which remain there for us to learn from the pages of history.

It is indeed an honour to be here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, we stand at a point of great challenge in Europe today. It is not an easy time at all. And we are missing what many of those challenges are in the long term, in favour of looking at the short term.

Although we speak here today about religious and ethnic communities, I would like to take a few lessons from another type of community --- the community of my profession.

My professional community (that of the scientific and cultural community engaged in higher education and research) takes its name 'academia' from the Greek word 'akademia', which was a sacred space just outside ancient Athens. It was dedicated to the goddess of wisdom, and has come to mean the accumulation of knowledge; its simultaneous development and transmission across generations. Supposedly, for the benefit of humanity at large.

For that reason, in the months before September 11, I began to write a proposal looking at Muslims in Europe; it was my supposition that an academic project of that nature would be a welcome addition to the body of human knowledge. It was actually begun just after 9/11, before the topic of Muslims in Europe became quite so topical as it is now, and completed just before the bombings in London on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005.

Unbeknown to myself, I picked the right time; suddenly, because of the London bombings, the subject of European Muslims became ever more important. It became incredibly easy to find a publisher to distribute the work! And obviously, many, not unlike the organisers of this conference, were keen to hear the thoughts of myself and my colleagues in this field on the issues relating to the Muslim European presence. There were a slew of books, academic projects, conferences; whereas a few years earlier, few would have been remotely interested in the second largest religious community of Europe, the situation then became one where everyone wanted to hear about it. Indeed, while I am speaking here today in Cordoba, I am speaking at Cairo University in November, on precisely the same issue. Both instances would have unthinkable several years ago.

But it was also the wrong time, for two reasons. Firstly, because some did not want to just hear about it; they wanted to talk about it. And sometimes, and this must be admitted, the wrong people were identified as 'experts'. Academia is supposed to be the bastion of meritocracy, where you rise through the ranks by peer review, scholarly exchange, and adherence to standards of excellence. Yet, after 9/11 and 7/7, it all too often became the case that individuals who had no credibility within their own scholastic fields became known as 'experts' to wider society because of their presentation, and how easily they catered to the fears of their audiences. How many times did my colleagues complain to me that the latest 'expert' on the Arab world on TV did not know Arabic; or that the latest 'insight' on the Muslim community in the UK (for example) came from someone who had not done any empirical work. While, ironically, the experts who had spent years in universities and in the field, as practical researchers, were left out in the cold. Part of this was understandable; the media world listens to the loudest, and the academic world expects to be consulted. If they

are not consulted, and others shout, then it will be those who shout that become heard. And often, they shouted feeding into our worst fears and insecurities.

And this was the second reason that it was the wrong time. The wrong time, in that the real themes of the research, in trying to understand things we had yet to fully comprehend, were ignored, and sacrificed on the alter of 'security'. Muslims in Europe, their characteristics, the role they have in European societies, their challenges and successes, became objects of research. Not actors, but subjects. They were the alien 'other' in our midst.

Ladies and Gentleman: I mention that here, right now, in order to place this presentation, and indeed, perhaps other presentations, into their appropriate background. It is a background, that is shared not only across Europe, but beyond. It is of supreme importance, for the benefit of our continent, and the well-being of our societies, to ask these questions about discrimination, about identity, about integration. But had 9/11 and 7/7 not taken place, I doubt these subjects would be recognised as so important. They are now 'crisis' questions, whether we wish to admit it or not. That can be helpful, but it can also entice us to deliver answers that cut corners, and which are superficial. Often, it has to be said, making the problems even more difficult to resolve. We have already come dangerously close to allowing it to spread beyond control. Already, the far-right and others in Europe have succeeded in making the fear of Muslims and Islam into a mainstream political position that is shared not only by those on the far-right, but on the centre and the left. It is a frightening development that statements like 'Muslims are a cancer in our society' can be uttered by members of a mainstream party in Denmark earlier last year. It is worse that the entire discourse is beginning to be affected by the fear of 'Euro-Arabia', as though Muslims are about to violently take over European countries and destroy Western civilisation from within. In the past few years, this has become more and more commonplace, and we must own up to it, and face the fears head on.

It is not, I should emphasise, simply a struggle against intolerance and discrimination against Muslims that we are concerned with here. Intolerance in general threatens our values as Europeans, no matter what group in our borders suffers.

When I say that the fears must be faced, I do not advocate that we cease talking about them. All indications, whether from the international, continental or national level, show that the fears are there; and the resulting intolerance of Muslims exists, and cannot be denied. If someone is afraid, then they have the right to be afraid, and in a cohesive, civilised society, their neighbours have the duty to assuage their fears. It's not a right that fearful has upon the neighbour, but it is a duty the neighbour has. But just because these fears are legitimate, because fears are always legitimate (how can one argue with an emotion), what is not legitimate is to allow it to translate into damaging action. An example from the US; later this month is 'Islamofascism Awareness Week' on a huge number of American university campuses. A perfect example of taking the correct fear that ordinary Americans feel vis-à-vis radical extremists, and then exploiting it by allowing the most rabid intolerant racists to take their fears and use them for their own narrow political ends.

This is also a danger; ignoring the fear, or denying the fear, does not cause it to disappear. On the contrary, it causes it to become even more widespread, and we have seen how this took place over the past few years. There are concerns about community cohesion and

national viability that may be unfounded, but they are there, and they need to be addressed. But they need to be addressed in a way that makes us all partners and neighbours in the discussion; not as enemies or as adversaries. And in a way that addresses the problems at their root; for now, when we all care about it, and for the future, when other issues may occupy our attention. In the best traditions of Europe, we should do this with an open spirit; not out of a search for 'reciprocity' with any other region. Our values are not to be bartered; they are to be exercised.

There are three main sets of proposals that I have decided to highlight here today: education in the mainstream, education in the Muslim community, and education in the policy establishment.

1. In terms of the first: it is clear that in mainstream education, as well as media, there are images of Islam that are based on fear and misinformation, rather than from academia or expertise. The media will always be sensationalistic, and it is unclear what governments can do in this regard, although one would hope that the NGOs in this room would take note, and perhaps funding bodies as well to finance initiatives designed to provide authentic information on these communities, their histories and their contributions. However, in mainstream education, the schoolbooks are still in dire need of including what academia has been arguing for decades; the recognition of not only a tense relationship between Islam and Europe, but also a constructive and mutually beneficial one. We hear much of the former, but not so much of the latter. Teaching authentic knowledge of Islam is not a necessity merely for Muslims, but for neighbours of Muslims as well in a society that values knowledge. We need to inculcate a vision of Europe that includes Muslims as Europeans; not as permanent resident aliens. Some jurisdictions do not allow for Islam to be taught in the public school system; we will need to find a way to account for such irregularities, while respecting the particularities of every nation. We must pay close attention to the work of institutions and organisations such as the Open Society Institute, the Alliance of Civilisations, and the Monitoring Centre in Vienna. With further education as to the particular duties of the Muslim religion, it is hoped that jurisdictions will find ways to account for such duties in their laws (so, for example, permitting extra time off on Fridays or prayer breaks during the working day). Some jurisdictions have already managed to do this successfully; it remains to be seen if good practise can be exported elsewhere.

- a) Provide authentic information to media from non-governmental bodies*
- b) Funding for such initiatives from governmental and non-governmental sources*
- c) Education reform to reflect contribution as well as tensions from Muslims (not unlike any European community historically) to European civilisation*
- d) Basic religious knowledge about Islam for all*

2. Education of Muslims in Islam is vitally important, particularly in this climate. We recognise, and have to recognise, that there is a radical neo-religious imperative out there that seeks to indoctrinate our youth in a version of Islam that is neither historically valid, nor conducive to the well-being of our continent. We are fortunate that Islam itself has a history of fruitful co-existence in societies as far apart as China and Timbukto, let alone in Europe where it has a history dating back a thousand years. However, the creed of Islam must be taught to our youth in the same tradition that made such co-existence possible. At present, there is a regrettable void in many parts of Europe when it comes to religious authority; it is

unclear to many that in a religion that disavows a sacred clerical hierarchy, there is still a system of religious authority, very similar to my own professional community of academia. We need to identify centres of learning in Europe and the Muslim world, such as the Aal al-Bayt Foundation in Jordan, or the Qarawiyeen University in Morocco, that can serve as resources for educating in that tradition, and more forward in assisting in the translation of these materials. It will also be crucial to compare and contrast the different models that have emerged thus far in terms of institutionalised religious authority, such as in Austria, Spain, and Belgium. At present, there are still some loopholes, where chaplains for the Muslim faith, for example, may not be positively discriminated against, but they do not receive the same levels of compensation as representatives of other faiths.

- e) Authentic education in Islam at all levels for Muslim, whether in state schools or private schools*
- f) Centres for teaching ministers (imams) for the Islamic faith at graduate and postgraduate level, linked to centres of learning elsewhere*
- g) Identifying solutions and experiments in European countries to learn lessons for all*
- h) Establishing relationships with centres of learning in the Muslim world for knowledge transfer}*

3. The above are long term measures, that must be undertaken. But we have a vital need for raising the bar for our own policy establishment, by forming connections between it, both on the national and supra-national levels, with academic networks that have been hitherto the guardians of knowledge in these areas. There are, thankfully, efforts in this vein taking place; I myself am a placement fellow at my country's Foreign Office on secondment from my University, looking at possible lessons from other European countries on the institutionalisation of the Muslim presence in Europe. But the efforts need to intensify, and deepen.

- i) Knowledge transfer between academia and policy through regular briefing sessions*
- j) Policy-academic networks*
- k) Secondments and placements*

Ladies and gentlemen: in the final analysis, this will take a number of steps, over a long period of time. No one should be under any delusion that it will happen overnight; but equally, no one should feel that because it is a task of some duration that it should not be pursued with dedication. The next generation will judge us on how we reacted in this time of adversity, and we owe to it to all of our citizens, now and for the future, to give them an alternative to a world of fear, where the terrorists win by default. His Excellency Amr Moussa indicated yesterday that Islam is hard to beat, if we ever wanted to embark on such a course. I put it to you that we have much to lose in such a confrontation, particularly as it would mean fighting ourselves in our own countries. On the other hand, we have so much more to gain by learning the original lessons of Cordoba, during the aforementioned Golden Age.

We owe it to all of our citizens to have them feel secure and comfortable beyond their borders, but also within their borders, in this new modern world of such difference and diversity. We have the tools, we have the resources and we have the ability: all we need to confirm is that we have the will. The will can come from the OSCE, but that is up to the esteemed delegates around the table to take forward. As for my part, I hope I have not taken too much time, and thank you for your attention.