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Islam and Christian-Muslim relations in Norway

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I was not sure where to begin my lecture this evening. Should I start with the trust-building work of the national Contact Group between the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council, a forum for Christian-Muslim engagement which celebrates its 20 years anniversary these days? Or should my starting point be the terrible terrorist attack on 22 July 2011 which left 69 dead and 55 severely injured at the Labour Party's youth camp on the island of Utøya? The massacre was carried out by a self-declared cultural Christian who was bent on defending Europe against a Muslim invasion made possible by naïve multiculturalists. Or perhaps I should start by citing the Norwegian Police Security Service's recent concern about mounting radicalization among Muslim youth in Norway, an issue that currently dominates media debates about Islam in Norway? Or would it better to start with the silent encounters that take place at the everyday level – across cultural backgrounds, between Christians, Muslims, other believers, and secular minded citizens?

Maybe a picture from the first funeral after Utøya can do as a point of departure. The first victim to be buried was Bano Rashid, a 19 year old Kurdish-Norwegian girl. Her mixed cultural and religious identity was symbolized by the Norwegian and Kurdish flags on her coffin, and even more so by the male imam and the female priest who jointly officiated at the funeral.

For me, this picture visualizes the double reality of Christian-Muslim relations in Norway: Firstly, a faith-transcending sense of solidarity which corresponds with strong community values in Norwegian society as well as trust-building dialogue among religious leaders. Secondly, an aggressive form of identity politics which found its most dramatic expression on 22 July 2011 and which also – albeit in less violent forms – tend to dominate media debates about Islam.

In my following reflections, I will try to give a picture of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations in Norway with a view to some dominant values in Norwegian society; anti-Islamic sentiments in public debates; the issues of radicalization and extremism; and developments in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Muslims in Norway

Like in other Western European countries, Muslims in Norway either trace their Norwegian roots back to labor immigration from the 1970s, or they have come as refugees and asylum seekers from the late 1980s onwards. A recent estimate indicates that maybe 230 000 Norwegian residents – 4.5% out of a total population of 5 million – are Muslims by cultural background. These numbers don't tell us much about the significance of religion in their lives, but in 2013 about 50 % (120 000) of those with a Muslim background had actually signed up for membership in a Muslim congregation.

As for membership in mosques, one should note that Norway has got a rather generous system of financial support for the faith communities, historically as a compensation for the state church system by which the Church of Norway is still financed by general taxation. Other faith communities – including the Islamic ones – are entitled to the same amount in financial support per member as the Church of Norway. Thus the relatively high degree of organization among

Norwegian Muslims may also reflect the pecuniary interests of the mosques to have as many as possible signing up as members (for free).

The percentage of mosque members and of self-declared Muslims are considerably higher for Oslo and some other cities. 8 % of the residents in Oslo are members of a Muslim congregation, and almost 20 % of the capital's teenagers identified themselves as Muslims in a poll published in 2012.¹

Oslo can also boast of a higher number of purpose-built mosques (currently six) than in any other Northern European city. Whereas some years ago, the Norwegian Integration Barometer showed that 50 % of Norwegians opposed the building of mosques in Norway, religious leaders seem to be far more welcoming.² For instance when in 2011 the foundation stone was laid for Oslo's brand new Shi'ite mosque, representatives of the local church, the Rabbi of Oslo as well as a Sunni Muslim imam took part in the ceremony.³

As for Muslim ecumenism, in 1993 an umbrella organization called the Islamic Council Norway was formed. Differently from many other European countries, the initiative did not come from political authorities seeking a representative Muslim body to talk with. Instead, the establishment of the Islamic Council came as a direct response to an invitation from the Church of Norway to form a national Contact Group for Christians and Muslims – an initiative that triggered an ecumenical effort on the Muslim side. From the late 1990s, the political authorities too have established a regular communication with the Islamic Council, which from 2007 receives a financial grant from the government.

In terms of cultural background, the largest groups of Muslims trace their roots back to Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Morocco. The combined effect of a great variety of cultural backgrounds and

organizational impetuses from Norwegian society (the public funding goes to individual faith communities) gives a high degree of intra-Muslim pluralism. This includes the tension between the culturally based “folk Islam” of first generation Muslim immigrants, and the “normative Islam” advocated by Norwegian-borne Muslims who often distinguish sharply between their cultural background and the perceived essentials of Islam which some of them – as we shall see – identify with Norwegian values.

In terms of religious practice, there is still a lack of reliable sociological data. But the respondents who report the highest degree of religious participation in polls are those with a Pakistani, Somali or Turkish background – with Iranians and Bosnians at the bottom end, and Iraqis somewhere in the middle.⁴

A Gallup opinion poll from 2006 showed that the Muslim respondents fell into three groups of about the same size when asked how often they attended “religious ceremonies together with others”. 27% of the respondents said that they attended at least once a month. The opposite figure of 31% stating that they never took part in such activities might indicate a high degree of polarization among cultural Muslims when it comes to religious practice together with others. The remaining 36 % seemed to follow the folk church pattern of visiting the mosque a few times a year, and on special occasions.⁵ (The corresponding Christian figures gave fewer regular practitioners, a higher percentage of occasional churchgoers, but fewer non-goers.)

Endorsement of social democratic values

Moving to political aspects of the Muslim presence in Norway, Muslim visibility is of course more than minarets. At the level of political representation, most parties now have a number of well-known representatives of Muslim

background. Since 2001, three young Muslim women and two men have been elected as (regular or deputy) Members of Parliament, representing quite different parties. Even the Christian Democrats have boasted of Muslim voters who sympathize with their traditional ‘family values’, their restrictive policy regarding distribution of alcohol, and their understanding attitude towards making religious claims in the public sphere.

As indicated by some polls, however, the majority of Muslims seems to support the social democrat and socialist parties. In the 2006 survey cited above, 83% of the Muslim respondents (against 45% of the control group representing the general population) said that they had given their vote either to the Labor Party or to the Socialist Party in the latest parliamentary elections. Corresponding figures from a survey in 2007, in which 82% of non-Western immigrants revealed the same inclination,⁶ indicate that socialist preferences may reflect immigrant interests in general rather than Muslim sensibilities more specifically.

(Unfortunately, more recent polls regarding political inclinations have not been made and it could be that some Muslim voters – in accordance with recent developments on the Norwegian political scene – have now moved towards the center-conservative end of the spectrum.)

It is interesting to note, however, that some Muslim leaders in Norway have referred to the underlying values of the Norwegian welfare state (which is generally associated with social democracy) as coming very close to Islamic ideals. For instance, in 2005 Shoaib Sultan (who became later the General Secretary of the Islamic Council) stated that

Many Muslims see today's welfare state in Norway as closer to the Muslim ideal state than many countries in the Muslim world, and Norwegian Muslims want to keep the Norwegian state as it is.⁷

Similar attitudes were expressed by a selection of Norwegian-Pakistani respondents who were interviewed in 2010 in connection with a qualitative research project on religious commitment and social integration, by utterances such as "The Norwegian welfare state is Islam in practice" and "Norway is more Islamic than Pakistan".⁸

A quantitative survey among pupils in upper secondary school in Oslo in 2009 yielded similar results. The survey showed that Muslim youth were significantly more inclined than their Christian or non-religious peers to give strong support to welfare state values such as income leveling⁹ and social equality in general.¹⁰

The cited tendency among Norwegian Muslims to associate social equality and welfare state principles with Islamic values could be interpreted in at least three different ways. (1) It could be taken as an expression of enlightened self-interest among immigrant groups who have benefited from welfare state arrangements in the process of integration. (2) It may also reflect dominant discourses in Norwegian society and the fact that welfare state values (although increasingly contested) are seen almost as a source of national pride, across political divides. (3) But it could also be seen as a reflection of a more general tendency among Muslim reformers to associate the Scandinavian welfare system with Islamic values. An interesting example of the latter tendency can be found in the books of Muhammad Qutb, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood. In view of the Islamic ideal of social justice, Qutb says (as early as in 1964), "the Scandinavian states have in this connection come closer than any other state in the world – to a realization of some aspects of Islam".¹¹

The cited interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Anyhow, the endorsement of welfare state values demonstrates how some Muslim spokespersons express their commitment to Islamic values in terms of perceived common (even emblematic) values in Norwegian society such as social equality and – as we shall see – equality between the sexes.

The centrality of women's issues

In the Scandinavian context, the aim of gender equality has traditionally been a central part of social democratic policies and welfare state arrangements, resulting in a kind of “state feminism” which corresponds with high cultural awareness about gender (in)equality in Norwegian society. The question of gender equality has also become the focus of immigration-related controversies. Stereotypes between Muslims, Christians and secular citizens in the West are often related to the perceived status of women – as objectified victims of either a “permissive” or a “patriarchal” culture (Grung 2004). Critical voices of liberal or neoconservative leanings regularly attack Muslim cultures and Islam as a religion which is inherently oppressive of women. From the mid-1990s, most media discussions on Islam in Norway have been focused on women-related issues such as arranged or forced marriages, the question of whether a Muslim woman may marry a non-Muslim man, female genital mutilation, and the headscarf (which is constantly debated but not banned, except in a few private enterprises and in the police).

On the other hand, Muslims also seem to be influenced in a more affirmative manner by gender models in Norwegian society. Several young women of Muslim (in particular, Pakistani or Somali) background have become publicly known for their vociferous protest against cultural practices associated by them

with the religion of 'Islam'. They are addressing women's issues not from the outside, but from within the Muslim communities.

A striking example of the way in which young Muslim leaders may identify Scandinavian gender equality values with Muslim convictions can be found in a newspaper article from 2009 entitled "Muslims in the process of change" by the then leader of the Muslim Student Association in Oslo, Bushra Ishaq. Here she stated:

The Muslim Nora¹² raised in Norwegian schools is now breaking free from traditional attitudes. We raise a struggle to realize ourselves as independent individuals, as Norwegian girls who have been taught to fight for gender equality. Were it not for the fundamental influence of Norwegian culture and the values of the welfare state, the emerging Muslim feminism would not be a fact.¹³

As mentioned, some young women representing an "emerging Muslim feminism" in Norway have established themselves as critical voices from within their immigrant cultures – such as Somali-borne Amal Aden who made headlines with her book "See us! A wake-up call from a young Norwegian-Somali woman" (2008).¹⁴ A dramatic episode occurred in the autumn of 2000 when Kadra Yusuf, another young woman of Somali background, equipped with hidden camera by a commercial TV station, revealed that a number of male African Muslim leaders either supported female circumcision or did not (as it seemed) clearly oppose it. As an immediate result, the then president of the Islamic Council – a highly respected Muslim of Gambian background who also had a long record in Christian-Muslim dialogue – chose to resign.¹⁵

It was against this background that Lena Larsen – a female convert to Islam and also a dialogue- and human rights activist – was elected as the new president of the Islamic Council, an event of almost historic dimensions. (It may not be a coincidence that Ingrid Mattson, who in 2006 was elected as chairperson of the Islamic Society of North America, is also of Scandinavian origin ...).

However, instances of female leadership in Muslim organizations are hard to find and the overwhelming majority of board members in Muslim organizations remain male. A survey in 2010 revealed that less than 3% of the mosques' board members and public spokespersons were women.¹⁶ The cited examples still illustrate how Islam is being inculturated in a Nordic environment marked by strong values of gender equality.

In sum, the above developments imply that the question of women in Islam is not really a debate between the Muslims and Norwegian society in general. It is just as much an intra-Muslim debate, in which young Muslim women – inspired both by “normative Islam” and Scandinavian values – increasingly set the agenda.

Relational perspectives (1): anti-Islamic sentiments and radicalization

The question of Muslim identities has also an important relational aspect to it. The ways in which Muslim profile themselves, must in part seen as a response to discourses about Islam in larger society. Public debates in Norway are no less influenced by anti-Islamic sentiments than other European countries. In the 2008 report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (Council of Europe), it was strongly recommended “that the Norwegian authorities monitor the situation as concerns Islamophobia in Norway and take swift action to counter any such manifestations as necessary.” The report also encouraged the

Norwegian authorities “to cooperate with representatives of the Muslim communities of Norway in order to find solutions to specific issues of their concern.”¹⁷

Public opinion and debate in recent years have of course been affected by the terrorist attacks of 22 July 2011. Although the nature of Anders Behring Breivik’s violence shocked everyone, including anti-Islamic activists, ideologically his so-called Manifesto borrows extensively from well-known anti-Islamic ideologues, in Europe and the US. The US report “Fear, Inc. The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America”, which was published in September 2011, documented the extent to which Breivik in his Manifesto had borrowed from anti-Islamic ideologues associated with neo-conservatism and the New Christian Right in the US.¹⁸

Although the anti-Islamic rhetoric of Breivik shares a family resemblance with populist warnings against “Islamic occupation” of Europe, his brutal violence is of course of a singular character. It should be noted, however, that the 2012 report of the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) warned against the potentially violent consequences of the enemy images produced by anti-Islamic agents who formally dissociate themselves from acts of violence.¹⁹

Despite the many expressions of faith-transcending solidarity after 22 July, internet debates indicate that anti-Muslim sentiments remain unabated.²⁰ Has nothing changed, then, in terms of popular attitudes? I think it has, to some extent. 2012 figures from the so-called ‘Integration barometer’ indicate that attitudes towards Muslims had become significantly less negative than before 2011. But four in ten still expressed skepticism of people with a Muslim faith.²¹

Among the political parties, it should be noted that the influential right-wing populist ‘Progress Party’ (*Fremskrittspartiet*) has an almost 30 years’ legacy of singling out Islam as an enemy to Norwegian society and to Christianity. It all started during the electoral campaign in 1987, when the then leader Carl I. Hagen flashed a letter which soon turned out to be a fake, signed by a Muslim and describing plans for a Muslim take-over of Norway. In 2009 the party leader Siv Jensen suggested that new and covert forms of Islamization (called “creeping Islamization”, a term seemingly inspired by the American “creeping sharia” discourse) could be identified in Norway. Another example of the party’s harsh rhetoric is the following characterization of Muhammad by Carl I. Hagen, as expressed in 2007: Muhammad was a ‘warlord, assailant and abuser of women ... who murdered and accepted rape as a means of conquest’.²²

And this is not something happening on the fringes of Norwegian politics. After gaining 16.3 % of the votes in the parliamentary elections in 2013, the party was invited to form a new government together with the larger Conservative Party (*Høyre*).

Anti-Islamic stands have also been voiced by groups associated with the New Christian Right, whose followers have been eagerly courted by the Progress Party. Several smaller organizations such as Stop the Islamization of Norway (SIAN) and Norwegian Defence League represent an even more hostile discourse in blogs and public debates.

But this is only one side of the picture. The anti-Islamic rhetoric of Norway’s right wing populist party has been strongly countered by mainstream Christian leaders who on numerous occasions have warned against Islamophobia and defamation of Muslims.²³ Attitudes towards Islam and Muslims have actually revealed a *cleavage* among Norwegian Christians – between (on the one hand)

“cultural Christians” and branches of charismatic Christianity which have been courted by the Progress Party, and (on the other) mainstream church leaders whose solidarity attitudes have been influenced by more than twenty years of trust-building dialogue with Muslims.

The tension between *confrontational tendencies* (as represented by the Progress Party, certain Charismatic groups and neoconservative activists) and *trust-building dialogue* was strikingly demonstrated during the Danish cartoon crisis in 2005-2006. Whereas in Denmark the liberal-conservative government simply refused to speak to Muslim organizations during the crisis (insisting that religion is a private matter), in Norway the social democrat-led government leaned on established structures for Christian-Muslim dialogue and engaged the Islamic Council as a partner in crisis management. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs financed Muslim-Christian delegations which went to the Middle East and Pakistan to demonstrate Norway’s commitment to peaceful dialogue. Domestically, politicians helped to stage a public reconciliation meeting between the editor of *Magazinet* – a mouthpiece of the New Christian Right which re-published the cartoons in Norway – and the Islamic Council.²⁴

Cleavages on the Muslim side are no less conspicuous. In recent years, fear of “radicalization” of Muslim youth has become a recurrent topic in public debate and groups of young Muslims have criticized the Islamic Council’s more accommodating attitude towards the political authorities and other faith communities. During the cartoon crisis in 2006 and in subsequent controversies about provocative cartoons and film, the Islamic Council has warned against demonstrations – a warning defied by more radical groups of Muslims who have taken to the streets in vociferous protest. In a 2010 demonstration, a young speaker accused Norway of crusading against Islam and warned of a Norwegian 9/11.²⁵ Two years later, in connection with the film “Innocence of Muslims”, a

new group of mainly young Muslims called “The Prophet’s Ummah” gained public attention for their fierce demonstration outside the American Embassy, rallying some 100 young people some of whom publicly invoked the example of Osama bin Laden. The Islamic Council, on the other hand, simultaneously held a meeting which could be seen as a conciliatory counter-demonstration, with 6,000 participants including the Bishop of Oslo and the Mayor of Oslo.

Among Muslim youth, the fastest growing organization over the last years has been Islam Net, a markedly value-conservative organization with Salafist inspiration and apologetic orientation. Unlike The Prophet’s Ummah, Islam Net does not have a militant profile. The organization regularly stages large conferences which attract a considerable number of Muslim teenagers and young adults. Regular international guests include the British speaker Abdur-Raheem Green. Although Islam Net’s gatherings are often called “peace conferences”, representatives of the organization take a confrontational attitude against “others” and markedly counter-cultural stands in issues such as gender relations (practicing strict segregation), homosexuality and the death penalty.²⁶

The radical-militant and conservative-apologetic profiles of the Prophet’s Ummah and Islam Net respectively are markedly different from that of the organization “Young Muslim” which – confluent with majority values – seeks to “contribute to the development of competent and well-integrated youth who is just as confident in their Muslim and Norwegian identity”.²⁷

As one can see, intra-Muslim tensions are no less visible than the intra-Christian ones.

Relational perspectives (2): Christian-Muslim dialogue

My second relational perspective has to do with interreligious dialogue, which was institutionalized earlier in Norway than in the other Nordic countries. Three regular forums deserve special mention: the bilateral Contact Group for the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council (established 1993),²⁸ the interfaith Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (established 1996)²⁹ and the interfaith council's international wing known as the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief. In the latter organization, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and humanist leaders seek to promote religious freedom and interreligious dialogue in cooperation with like-minded partners in other parts of the world.³⁰

Whereas the Contact Group came about as the result of an invitation from the majority church (the Lutheran Church of Norway), the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities grew out of minority protest against the new and compulsory subject of religious education in public schools which – when announced in 1995 – was felt by Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and the Humanist Association to be strongly dominated by Christian majority interest.

It is important to note that the Humanist Association has been a member of the interfaith council from the beginning and has also taken actively part in other multilateral dialogue projects. This has challenged both religious and non-religious dialogue partners to seek a faith-transcending (or secular) language for one's commitment, leaning of often on human rights discourse.

As for the bilateral Christian-Muslim Contact Group, the group's early agenda was marked by attentive listening from the majority church to Muslim minority concerns in Norway. Much debated issues in the 1990s were religion in school and anti-Islamic sentiments in public debates. The Contact Group has played a pivotal part in laying the ground for the church leaders' frequent protests against the anti-Islamic rhetoric of the Progress Party and the New Christian Right.

However, what started with minority Muslims appealing for solidarity from majority Christians has gradually evolved into a form of interaction with

clear elements of mutuality. In my interpretation of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Norway, active listening and sensitivity towards the situation of vulnerable minorities has gradually emerged as a *common* practice and a *shared* concern. Thus the Contact Group has not only addressed Muslim minority issues in Norway but also engaged itself in the precarious situation of Christians and other religious minorities in Muslim majority societies – as expressed in joint statements such as “Stop the violence against Christians in Pakistan” (2009).³¹

Gradually, a noticeable step has also been taken from group solidarity to a growing concern for *individuals* whose integrity and well-being may sometimes be threatened by their own cultural and religious group. In some recent statements of the Contact Group, about the right to conversion (2007)³² and violence in close relationships (2009)³³, the focus of attention has clearly moved from protection of minority *groups* to defence of vulnerable *individuals*. In the joint statement about the right to change one’s religions, which evoked international attention, Christians and Muslims jointly promise to protect those who embark upon the risk project of changing one's religion:

The Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations jointly declare that everyone is free to adopt the religious faith of their choice. We denounce, and are committed to counteracting all violence, discrimination and harassment inflicted in reaction to a person’s conversion, or desire to convert, from one religion to another, be it in Norway or abroad.³⁴

Although the basic message is moulded in human rights language, the joint statement also refers to the respective religious resources, although without any further elaboration on the legal and theological reasoning underlying their conclusion:

We interpret our religious traditions such that everyone has the right to freely choose their religious belief and faith community, and to practice their religion publicly as well as privately.

If the above can be taken as representative, Christian-Muslim dialogue has in fact taken quite a few steps away from religious group interests, in the direction of a human rights commitment that challenges traditional attitudes within the religions.

Another recurrent theme in the Contact Group's work has been the situation of women in religious cultures. As mentioned, in 2009 the Christian-Muslim Contact Group issued a joint declaration against violence in close relationships.³⁵ In this joint statement, violence against women is characterized as “brutal breaches of fundamental human rights” and “criminal deeds that violate both our religious teachings and human rights’. On a self-critical note, the statement emphasizes that “we strongly condemn any misuse of the teachings of our religions in order to legitimize violence in the family or in close relationships.”

If we look at the way in which these statements are formulated, they draw just as much on human rights language as on specifically religious resources. Apart from human rights language, the statements are also marked by what I would call an ethics of vulnerability – reflecting (perhaps) a humanistic reinterpretation of religious ethics.

It should be noted, however, that such statements primarily reflect the commitment of some dedicated individuals who are pushing their communities in a certain, humanistic direction. Although these statements were formally representative at the time of publication, they only live as long as new leaders

and activists are willing and able to re-commit their faith communities to such humanistic values.

United against extremism?

Let me conclude with a more recent Christian-Muslim statement on religious extremism, issued in November 2011, after a study trip to Bosnia – and the terror of 22 July 2011. In post-22 July debates, a recurring issue has been the relation between narrow and wide definitions of extremism. The question has been how to understand Breivik's extreme violence: Was his actions driven by insanity or a violent motor that could be fueled by anything? Or must they be seen as an extreme expression of relatively widespread anti-Islamic attitudes, as reflected in Breivik's Manifesto?³⁶

The group's statement links extremism to violence: "Extremism involves the use of violence, force or threats to promote the extremists' idea". However, it stresses the need "to identify and oppose tendencies to religious extremism as early as possible ". Thus it indicates a sliding scale which begins with the extremists' conviction "that they are alone in interpreting their own religion correctly" and ends with the explicit willingness to use violence to enforce their convictions on others who are defined as deadly enemies. On this sliding scale from attitudes to action, the statement also notes the refusal to coexist with certain groups of people, and the language of hate, as signposts on the road to violent expressions.

Interestingly in the light of both Breivik's anti-feminism and the centrality of women's issues in the Nordic context, the Christian-Muslim statement also includes religiously motivated violence against women in its broad definition of extremism: "Extremists use gender-based hierarchies and power structures in

which women are denied human rights and human dignity on the same level as men.” Correspondingly, Christian and Muslim congregations are urged “to oppose hateful descriptions and harassment of women”, as part of their monitoring of potentially extremist attitudes – in order to identify tendencies to religious extremism as early as possible.

With regard to the noted question of religious versus secular language in Christian-Muslim statements, it is interesting to note that the statement against extremism – more explicitly than previous joint statements – mobilizes God-language.

Religious extremists put themselves in the place of God and believe that they are fighting on behalf of God against the enemies of God. Religious extremism is therefore contrary to the teachings of our religions, especially with respect to the basic dignity and rights of all human beings.

In contrast, these Christians and Muslims declare, true faith in God may in fact lead to a protection of human integrity:

The idea of forcing one’s opinions on others is fundamentally opposed to the responsibility and right which we believe that God has given to all human beings, to make their own decisions.

In conclusion

I have tried to demonstrate how Islamic identities in Norway relate to central features of the Scandinavian context such as welfare state values, gender equality, and a self-image of dialogical culture and peaceful conflict resolution.

Some groups respond in pro-cultural way, other on a distinctively counter-cultural note.

In the case of Christian-Muslim dialogue, it can partly be seen as a critical response to confrontational identity politics on both sides. Transcending mere group solidarity, a joint concern for the vulnerable individual can also be noticed.

But I'm not sure what direction Christian-Muslim cooperation will take in the future. That depends on the next generation of leaders – who can easily slide back into group protection, if a joint commitment to the integrity of the individual is not kept alive and further developed in joint action.

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