

THE WORLD IN NUMBERS

# A Muslim Europe?

*In the short term the EU must assimilate its small but restive Muslim populations—and in the long term it may have an Islamic majority*

From the ban on headscarves in French schools to the debate over Turkish membership in the EU, European political controversies increasingly reflect fears of Islam. Some observers have even speculated that Europe will one day soon have a Muslim majority—by the end of the twenty-first century “at the very latest,” the widely renowned scholar Bernard Lewis, an emeritus professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton, casually told a German newspaper last July.

At first blush such anxiety seems unwarranted. There are 15.2 million Muslims in the fifteen countries that joined the EU before 2004—only about four percent of the total population there. And that percentage is smaller still when the Eastern European countries that joined the EU last year are factored in. Even the addition of Turkey’s 68 million Muslims would bring the total to only 15 percent of Europe’s overall population.

But a number of factors are converging to swell the Muslim presence in what was once Christianity’s heart-

land. Birth rates have fallen well below replacement levels in a number of European countries, and there is little expectation that this trend will reverse itself. The latest UN projections see Europe’s overall population dropping from about 728 million in 2000 to roughly 630 million in 2050.

The Continent’s Muslim population, however, represents a stark exception to this trend. Europe’s Muslims are considerably younger than its non-Muslims, and their overall birth rate is roughly three times as high. Small wonder that by 2015, when Europe’s population will have fallen by roughly 3.5 percent from the present level, the Muslim population is expected to have doubled—and that’s assuming no significant increase in the conversion rate on a continent where Christianity’s decline in recent decades has left an unprecedented religious vacuum.

In addition, about 900,000 immigrants reach European shores each year—and Muslims from the Middle East and North Africa make up an increasing proportion of these new arrivals. So far this influx has been driven largely by conditions in the Muslim world, but it is likely to be amplified by a demand for immigrant workers in European nations in the decades ahead, as the graying of Europe’s population puts an increasing strain on its welfare-state economy. According to a 2000 UN projection, the EU states would need 949,000 immigrants a year to maintain their 1995 population, 1,588,000 a year to maintain their 1995 working-age population, and a stunning 13,480,000 a year to maintain the 1995 ratio of working-age to retired residents.

Relying too heavily on demographic projections can be a fool’s game, of course; recall that the feared “population bomb” of the 1970s never detonated. But integrating even exist-

ing Muslim minorities already poses a serious cultural and political challenge for European society. The relatively small size of the Islamic population is counterbalanced by its concentration in a few Western European nations—particularly France, Germany, and the Low Countries—and by the tendency of Muslim immigrants to cluster around large cities (two fifths of Britain’s Muslims live in greater London, and a third of France’s Muslims in the Paris area), often in neighborhoods and vast housing projects that are culturally and economically isolated from the wider society.

The inhabitants of these Muslim ghettos are vulnerable to the woes that usually afflict marginalized populations: high crime rates, poor education, rampant unemployment. And this, in turn, may make them receptive to the lure of radical Islam. Only a small minority of European Muslims are hard-core Islamists. But the radical strain in what Olivier Roy, of the French National Center for Scientific Research, calls “EuroIslam” is potent enough to make Europe both an ideal training and staging ground for terrorism (since 9/11 European authorities have reportedly arrested roughly twenty times as many terror suspects as the United States has) and a target of opportunity for would-be *jihadis* (as in last spring’s Madrid bombings). Unsurprisingly, these factors also tend to spur anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant backlash—exemplified by the high vote total earned by Jean-Marie Le Pen’s quasi-fascist National Front in France’s most recent presidential election.

Experts disagree about how difficult it will be to integrate the growing Muslim population. In 2002, for instance, Peter Mandaville, the author of *Transnational Muslim Politics* (2001), argued, “Despite the presence of radi-



**WHERE THEY COME FROM**  
*Predominant homelands of Muslim immigrants in various European countries*

Austria	Turkey (50%)
Belgium	Morocco (55%)
Denmark	Turkey (27%)
Finland	Somalia (23%)
France	Algeria (30%)
Germany	Turkey (68%)
Greece	Turkey (50%)
Italy	Morocco (34%)
Luxembourg	Montenegro (25%)
Netherlands	Turkey (40%)
Portugal	Mozambique (N/A)
Spain	Morocco (N/A)
Sweden	Fmr. Yugoslavia (25%)
UK	Pakistan (45%)

SOURCE: TIMOTHY M. SAVAGE, “EUROPE AND ISLAM: CRESCENT WAXING, CULTURES CLASHING,” THE WASHINGTON QUARTERLY, SUMMER 2004

### MUSLIM POPULATION

- >5%
- 3-5%
- 1-3%
- <1%
- 1982 population
- 2003 population

### WANTED: MODERATE IMAMS

To reduce the influence of radical Muslim imams from the Middle East and North Africa, Europe's governments and its Islamic communities have been trying—without great success—to develop homegrown clerics. European governments now routinely monitor sermons and other public statements, and a number of imams have been expelled in recent years for preaching intolerance—most recently Abdelkader Bouziane, an Algerian-born cleric who was deported from France for insisting that the Koran licenses wife-beating.

### THE DUTCH DILEMMA

The rise of Islam is putting Holland's famous social tolerance to the test. In November a Moroccan immigrant assassinated the filmmaker (and critic of radical Islam) Theo van Gogh, sparking a wave of violence by and against Muslim immigrants. This incident comes on the heels of the 2002 assassination of Pim Fortuyn, a maverick politician whose campaign against Muslim immigration—which the openly gay Fortuyn viewed as a threat to Dutch liberalism—made his populist, right-wing LPF party a major electoral force.

### THE CITIZENSHIP QUESTION

Many European Muslims aren't citizens, which limits their political clout—but that reality is changing rapidly. In 2000, for instance, Germany eased its naturalization requirements. As a result German Turks were an important swing vote in the 2002 election, helping the incumbent center-left coalition stave off a challenge from the anti-immigration Christian Democrats.

### SUICIDE ATTACKS IN SPAIN

Last year's pre-election attacks on Spanish trains demonstrated how easily Muslim militants can move and strike in Europe. More recently authorities uncovered a plot to launch a suicide truck bomb against Spain's National Court, aimed at killing judges investigating Islamic terror. Muhammad Achraf, the alleged mastermind, is an Algerian born in the United Arab Emirates; he plotted the attacks while in Spain, and was later apprehended in Switzerland.

cal tendencies in European Islam ... the majority of Muslim youth understand themselves to be stakeholders in European society." But last year Timothy Savage, the chief of the U.S. State Department's Northern Europe and Regional Analysis Division, insisted that "younger Muslims are resisting assimilation into secular European societies even more steadfastly than

the older generation did." Nevertheless, the overall challenge is clear: European societies, never known for their melting-pot ethos, must find a way to assimilate an ever larger Muslim population over the next half century. And the United States must prosecute a conflict with radical Islam while managing a set of skeptical allies whose Muslim populations are restive, grow-

ing, and susceptible to radicalism. "The most important battle in the war for Muslim minds during the next decade will be fought not in Palestine or Iraq," Gilles Kepel, a French scholar of radical Islam, recently observed, but "on the outskirts of London, Paris, and other European cities, where Islam is already a growing part of the West."  
—ROSS DOUTHAT

SOURCE: TIMOTHY M. SAVAGE, "EUROPE AND ISLAM: CRESCENT WAKING, CULTURES CLASHING," THE WASHINGTON QUARTERLY, SUMMER 2004