

Fear Feeding Islamophobia, Says Report

By Greta Hopkins

BRUSSELS—Fear of Islam has led to increased hostilities against Muslims in the European Union after the terrorist attacks on the U.S., a new report shows.

The report “Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001” was released by the Vienna-based European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), an official agency of the European Union (EU).

“Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups have become targets of increased hostilities since 11 September,” says the report.

The report records the results of studies carried out in the 15 member states of the EU on aggression against Muslims from 11 September until the

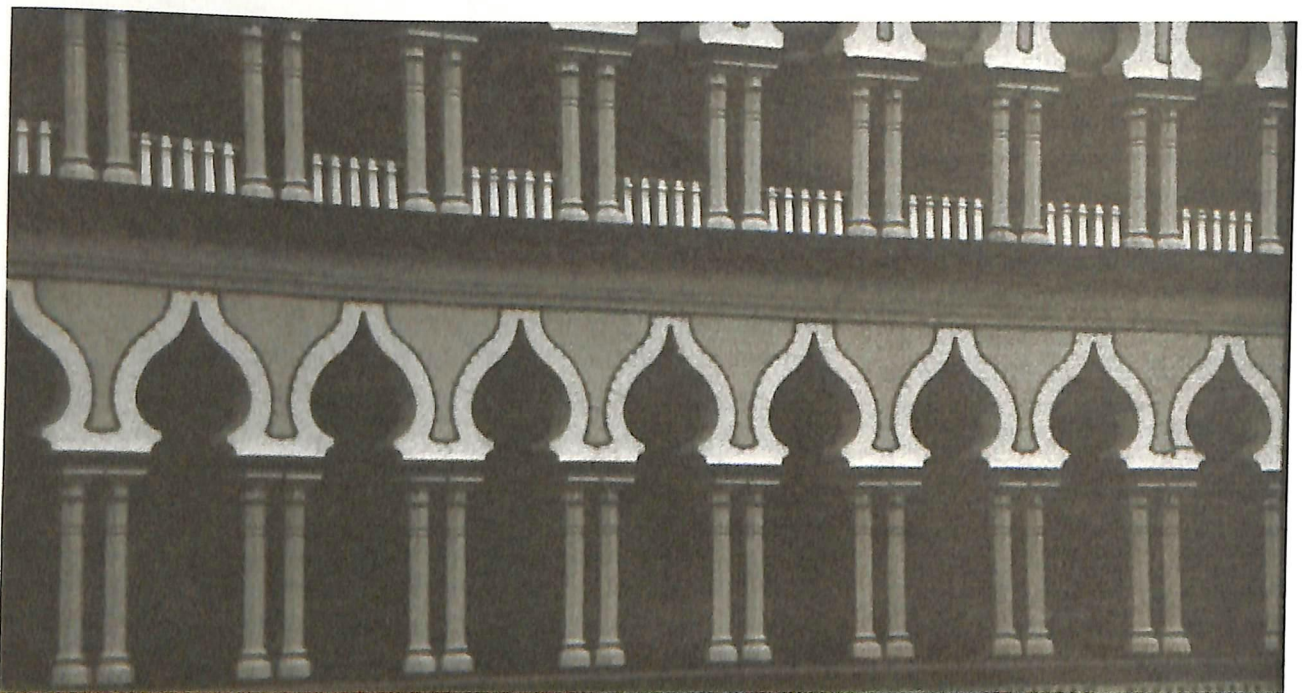
end of last year.

“September 11 brought a greater sense of fear across the EU, where anxieties about the perceived threat from potential internal terrorists and reciprocal attacks in Europe became incorporated into those prejudices that were already identifiably existent in numerous nationally constrained manifestations of ethnic xenophobia,” the report says.

The highest rise in attacks on Muslims was reported in Denmark, Britain, The Netherlands and Swe-

den. But Beate Winkler, director of EUMC, warns against reading into these figures too closely. The four countries reporting the highest number of incidents are those with the most efficient reporting systems, she says. The EMUC is still working on a common system of indicators so that fair comparisons can be made, she says.

Winkler says it was surprising that the “fear factor” became so important within such a short period of the 9/11 attack. But Bob Purkiss, EUMC chair, says the warning signs were already there. “September 11 merely acted as a detonator of feelings that have failed to be adequately addressed,” he says.



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Many far-right and neo-Nazi groups capitalised on this fear, the report says. The groups combined “a wider awareness of an apparent threat from Muslims and those prejudices that were already existent to locate new platforms from which their voices could be heard,” it says.

The report found that visible traits of Muslims such as the headscarf that many Muslim women wear provoked attacks. “Muslims, especially women, asylum seekers and others, including those who ‘look’ of Muslim or Arab descent, were at times targeted for aggressions,” the report says. “Mosques and Islamic cultural centres were also widely targeted for damage and retaliatory acts.”

Most recorded attacks did not involve physical violence. In one case in Germany, the Islamic religious community Hessen received daily hate mail and calls, especially against women wearing scarves.

Non-government organisations in Spain told researchers that they found the number of violent acts to be low. Spanish reports included racist graffiti on mosques and Muslim shops, and incidents between children of Moroccan descent and youngsters in some schools.

In Denmark, in just one day (14 September), a woman tried to set her Turkish neighbour’s apartment on fire, an imam received a death threat, and a youth was caught outside a mosque ready to hurl a Molotov cocktail.

A surprising result, says Winkler,

is that “Islamophobia has increased in areas where not many Muslims live. People are clearly looking for scapegoats.”

The EUMC calls for “meaningful intercultural dialogue” and “practical initiatives to bring communities together and tackle prejudice, disaffection and marginalisation.”

Winkler says the dialogue should include all groups including Muslims, Jews, Asians and white disaffected groups. “Valuable lessons are to be learned from the report, and it is our hope that it can be used in a pro-active way by EU institutions, governments, faith leaders, organisations and the media,” she says.

“The policy of doing nothing is as bad as racist policy,” says Purkiss. “It is imperative that Europe puts it own house in order if it is to be taken seriously.”

The report does bring some good news. Attempts to allay fears sometimes led to new interest in Islam and to practical inter-faith initiatives.

EUMC officials say a similar report on increased attacks on Jews as a result of the Middle East crisis is due to be published in June. “International events such as the 9/11 attacks, as well as the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, continue to have a destabilising effect on the social and political fabric of European society,” the report says.

Source: Inter Press Service, <http://www.ipsnews.net>, 24 May 2002

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Of the 246 million child workers, an estimated 171 children aged five to 17 work in hazardous conditions, including trafficking, forced and bonded labour, armed conflict, prostitution and pornography, and other illicit activities.

Boys outnumber girls in hazardous work across all age groups, with about one-half of working boys in hazardous occupations, compared with a little more than two in five working girls.

According to the study, child labour is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. The existence of child labour perpetuates household poverty across generations, slowing economic growth and social development.

However, poverty is far from being the only factor at play. The report said other causes include economic and political instability, discrimination, migration, criminal exploitation, traditional cultural practices, lack of decent work for adults, inadequate social protection, lack of schools, and a desire for consumer goods.

Somavia said the ILO would push for “child labour-free zones.”

“The world is increasingly aware of child labour and demanding action to stop it,” he said.

Source: Inter Press Service, <http://www.ipsnews.net>, 06 May 2002