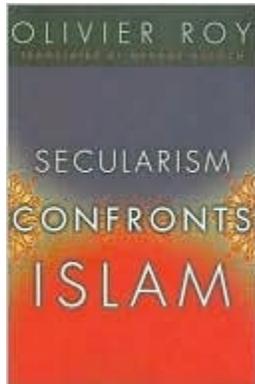




Secularism Confronts Islam

Olivier Roy , Joanne J. Myers

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs. On behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to thank you all for joining us as we welcome the widely acclaimed Islamic scholar, Olivier Roy, to our breakfast program.

Today he will be presenting his latest work, [Secularism Confronts Islam](#). I know his discussion will be a welcome addition to the Carnegie Council's growing library of resources on [religion in politics](#).

Over the past several years, no political or religious trend has taken the world more by surprise than the growth of Islam. This phenomenon has been accompanied by a denunciation in the West of its fundamentalist leanings and by a growing debate over how to integrate Islam into a Western liberal tradition.

Although Professor Roy's discussion begins in France, home to the largest Muslim population in Europe, with approximately 5 million people of Algerian and Moroccan extraction, the problems he discusses extend well beyond the borders of France. As he notes, it is not just the construction of mosques, the creation of representative Islamic bodies, and the wearing of the head scarf in schools that have sparked the public debate, but it is the articulation of a religious identity within the secular public sphere that goes to the very heart of the problem and has culminated in a systematic attack on all Muslims and on Islam.

As France tries to integrate its growing Muslim population, many are asking whether Islam is compatible with an increasingly liberal and secular society, a question that has relevancy for all of us in the West today.

Although some may argue that this is a salient issue, Professor Roy recasts the debate and says that the question itself is improperly framed, resting as it does on the view that there is but one Islam and one West. In *Secularism Confronts Islam*, Professor Roy addresses this issue as it uniquely applies to France and frames the discussion in the context of the history of *laïcité*. He explains this phenomenon as a particular form of secularization, a term derived from the anti-church social struggles in France that occurred in the early 20th century between the French state and the Catholic church and which limits the visibility of religion in the public sphere. The purpose was to keep religion out of government in a way that had not been done elsewhere.

While the French experience is specific to France and the book's argument rests upon this distinction,

Professor Roy draws on examples between *laïcité* and secularization for an analysis which still proves instructive in getting to the heart of the problem of why the Western approach to Islam is flawed. He wonders, for example, why Islam is being held up to secular demands that are not asked of other faiths, and argues that most Muslims do manage to adapt to local conditions, at least to the extent that those of other faiths do. He further notes that Muslim intellectuals have made it possible for Muslims to reside in the secularized world while still maintaining their identities as true believers, which, he points out, they have done by formulating a language that recognizes two separate spaces—that of religion and that of a secular society.

The redefinition of the place for religion is a complex challenge for the West, not solely because of the rise of Islam, but also due to the contemporary nature of the revival of religion in general. In writing *Secularism Confronts Islam*, Professor Roy invites us to think about Islam in the same framework as we think about other religions, and if we follow his lead, I know he will take our thinking in a new direction.

Please join me in giving a very warm welcome to a very special speaker, Olivier Roy.

Remarks

OLIVIER ROY: Thank you very much.

As has been said, the issue in France—but also in Europe—is how to assess the implications of the settlement of a huge Muslim population which will now remain permanently in the West. What are the consequences? How do we deal with that?

The first thing to do is to analyze what it means to be a Muslim in Europe. Roughly speaking, we have three perceptions of Muslims in Europe.

The first one is to consider that the Muslims in Europe are some sort of a diaspora of Middle Easterners, North Africans, and South Asians who are living in Europe, but would still consider themselves, and are considered, as foreigners, with strong ties, and sometimes also family ties, linguistic ties, cultural ties, with the countries of origin. Then, if we do consider them as a diaspora, the issue is, may these people constitute some sort of a fifth column in case of conflicts? That is one of the views.

The second view is to consider them as no longer a diaspora, but as some sort of not-really-assimilated minority, and using the paradigm of ethnic minorities, to consider them as some sort of cultural/ethnic minority, where religion, culture, and language is mixed, with a presupposition that these communities are more or less indigenous, with little interaction with the rest of the population. In other words, to consider them as a new ethnic minority living in Europe.

The third approach is to consider them as citizens, European citizens, French citizens, British citizens, with a different faith, a different religion, which is not necessarily so new in Europe. We have had Muslims in Europe for a long time—specifically, of course, in Central and Eastern Europe.

If we stick to one of these perceptions, then the consequences are, of course, very different.

The issue is, how do they consider themselves? How do they position themselves with these three dimensions?

Of course, we will find people who will use all of these three paradigms, who will consider themselves as a diaspora, some as citizens, some as a cultural minority. We have some sort of a repartition of the Muslim population in Europe along a broad spectrum of self-assigned identities.

But the problem is also, what are the tools of integration, the legal tools, the political tools? Here we can say that there are two dominant legal and political paradigms, in Europe.

One is multiculturalism. The idea is that, yes, our societies are now multiple societies, complex societies, and that we may have also a Muslim minority, as well as we may have—to find an example, I may be sometimes too polemical. Are the Corsicans in France an ethnic minority? There is a huge debate on that. Are the Huns an ethnic minority? What do we do with the Scots? Do we consider the Catholics in Northern Ireland as a minority?

Then the idea is to consider the Muslims using the same paradigm of a minority group and applying "minority groups" as it's often used in Central and Eastern Europe.

The other approach is the assimilationist approach, the idea that they should be treated and considered only as citizens. This is the French approach. The official term is not "assimilation." The official term is "integration." But it is clear in France that, in fact, by "integration" we mean "assimilation."

We had, I would say, for 20 years, some sort of competition between the two models. It is very interesting to know that during the 1980s and the early 1990s, people like me were never invited to other parts of Europe. I was always invited to the United States to speak about Muslims in Europe, never Great Britain or Holland. Why? Because our views were so different that we had little in common when discussing Muslims in Europe.

When the first so-called "veil affair" occurred in France at the end of the 1980s—by that I mean young school girls who were prevented from entering the schools because they were wearing veils (it was in 1989, if I am not mistaken)—there was a huge wave of protests in the other parts of Europe, in Great Britain in particular, criticizing France for not respecting human rights and freedom of expression and religious freedom. As you know, every year the State Department issues a report about the infringements of freedom of religion in France. We are not treated exactly the same way as Uzbekistan, China, and other countries, but still we are considered as not respecting freedom of religion.

But now, after 9/11, after the [assassination of Theo van Gogh](#) in Holland, suddenly there is a feeling in Europe that both our models, in fact, did fail. That multiculturalism is not working or is heading towards very negative side effects, and on the other hand, assimilation in France has created problems—not created, but has opened the door for polemics about what is the place, what is the role for religion in the French public space. Not only for Islam, by the way. Jehovah's Witnesses have the same problem, and, as you know, young Sikh schoolchildren have been expelled from school because they were wearing turbans.

So both models are in crisis. Why? Because, for me, both are based on the same premises, the idea that religion and culture are the same, the idea that every culture is based on a religion and every religion does express itself in a culture.

This was true for the first generations of Muslims coming to Europe. Yes, they were speaking a different language. Yes, they had a different diet. Yes, they didn't consider themselves as French or British and so on, even if they had the passport. During the 1980s, it was true that religion and culture could be considered as the expression of the same identity.

But now it's no more true. Now we have a disconnect between religion and culture. It's very obvious with the second and third generations. The ethnic, linguistic, cultural barriers between the different groups are collapsing, but not necessarily collapsing because of assimilation. What we have now is the reconstruction of religious identity without the bonds of culture, language, and history. Of course, this transformation of a population from a cultural minority to a faith community is problematic. It does entail crisis—for example, generational crisis—because fathers and sons (and daughters) don't speak the same language. Sometimes they literally don't speak the same language. The father is not fluent in French, while the children are not fluent at all in Arabic. So we have also these communication problems. It is why many young Muslims now reassert a religious identity which is no more associated with the country of origin of the family.

So what we are witnessing in Europe is a transformation from an ethnic minority into a faith community. These people want to be considered as citizens and Muslims. They don't consider themselves as a diaspora. But the problem is that they are considered as a diaspora—either as a real or as a would-be. And here we have a big, big gap between the official policies on the one hand and the reality of the Muslim population on the other.

Many countries—but not France; France is absolutely opposed to the concept—are now promoting a dialogue of civilizations, and even an [Alliance of Civilizations](#), which is a new tool, which has been supported by the United Nations and by the Spanish government. [Jorge Sampaio](#) is chairing the organization.

But for me, it's based on the wrong premises. If you speak of a dialogue of civilizations, you share the same ideas that a civilization is a mixture of culture and religion and that you cannot separate culture from religion. If you do consider that, then Muslims will never be Europeans.

A month ago I was in Cordoba, in Spain. There was a [conference](#) organized by the [OSCE](#) [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] on "Islamophobia." It was very interesting. The foreign delegations which were invited—there were two. One was the Muslim League, which is no more—sorry, it's not the Muslim League; the [Organization of the Islamic Conference](#) (OIC). It's a government organization, but it is about Islam. So it was normal to invite them.

But the secretary-general of the [Arab League](#) was also invited, which is a problem. The Arab League is not a Muslim organization. When Lebanon is heading the Arab League, the chair is a Christian, and you have many Christian Arabs. I repeat, the Arab League is not a Muslim organization. But they were invited to speak on behalf of the Muslims in Europe.

In the audience, there were many organizations of European Muslims. They were all appalled. They said, "We may be ethnic Arabs. Why not? But we have nothing to do with Egypt and the Middle East."

The diplomats spoke about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, about the war in Iraq, about the war in Afghanistan. The idea was that we should set out all these conflicts in order to prevent turmoil in Europe. But as for the European Muslims, none of them mentioned the Palestinian conflict, Iraq, or Afghanistan. They were all speaking about how to have halal food in Europe, how to build mosques, how to settle the issues of the veil, what should be the rules for coexistence, and so on. They all spoke using the language of their country, not of origin. The German delegation was very adamant, but they spoke in German. They spoke about problems in Bayern.

Here I think we are at the core of the issue. It's not just to say that the solution is to consider European Muslims as European citizens. Most of them—not all—do consider themselves as citizens, and many of them consider themselves also as believers, but not all of them. And here we have a problem. If we consider that everybody coming from the Middle East is a Muslim and belongs to a minority, then we assign them a religion and an identity which is not necessarily the way he or she considers himself or herself.

There is another issue, which is more and more important, the issue of conversion and apostasy. Apostasy is also conversion, by definition. If you consider that as long as you are Muslim because of your ethnic background, while you should remain a Muslim, then there is the problem of individual freedom, the right to change religion. It's a big issue. We saw it in Malaysia, for instance. There has been a big problem because the high court refused to recognize a change of religion from Islam to Christianity. This problem of apostasy and conversion will be growing, not only in Europe, but everywhere, because now everywhere religions are more and more disconnected with culture. Everywhere we have missionaries and teachers, Muslims and Christians, and they are competing. They are competing for the same people.

If you look in France, for instance, at the map of the mosques and the map of the evangelical

churches—the buildings, the construction of buildings—the two maps coincide. The places where people are building mosques are exactly the places where evangelicals are building churches. It's normal, because they are addressing the same kind of population—uprooted (in every sense of the term) people, disenfranchised youth, people who have lost their way, who don't know who they are exactly. In the Parisian suburbs, for example, you have this increase of both Islamic preaching and evangelical preaching. Both, by the way, are very much resented by the local authorities.

There are a lot of stories about Islamophobia, but also we have stories about local authorities—not state people, but city mayors—acting against evangelicals. There is a lot of propaganda against the so-called cults. But if you look at the list of the cults, they have everything, including Christian denominations.

We have a North African evangelical church, with about 10,000 believers. They address only the people who come from North Africa or who are descendants of North Africans. They use Arab music. They are proud of their Arabic culture, but they consider themselves as Christians, evangelical Christians.

So the borders between the different groups are now disappearing—not disappearing perhaps, but they are not clear now. The only way, for me, to address this evolution is to consider people as individuals and citizens, and to put first freedom of choice. We have to recognize freedom of religion, but as a personal choice, not as an assignment by birth. This is the only way. It does coincide with what is going on, something which is very, very important.

For example, look at Great Britain. They are putting a lot of stress on community leaders, trying to enlist community leaders to appease the youth and to prevent youths from turning to violence. The problem is that youths who turn to violence don't care about community leaders. They don't consider that these people who are community leaders are their leaders. They don't care. The youth which turns to violence is a disenfranchised youth, which doesn't belong to a community.

If we look everywhere in Europe, it's the same pattern. The interesting thing is that the patterns of the radicals are exactly the same in Europe. The government policies are very different, the political culture may be very different from Spain to France to Great Britain, but the patterns of the young radicals are exactly the same. These guys do not belong to a community. They don't recognize themselves as members of a community.

So to try to address the issue of violence through community leaders is a big mistake. The violence is a consequence, on the contrary, of deculturation, of uprooting, and the consequence of a generation gap, the fact that these young people do not consider that their parents are a model, for good or bad reasons.

So what we are confronting now is a growing individualism among the Muslim population. What we are trying to do, on the contrary, is to "recommunitize" them, to give them a sense of belonging to a community. But these communities have lost their sociological, linguistic, and cultural basis.

So for me, the aim of the European policies should be, first, to act in the framework of the local political culture. It's clear that in France there is a specific political culture which is not the same in Great Britain. But it's not a problem. Through these local political cultures, we should consider the Muslims as citizens, as individuals. We should stress freedom of religion and freedom to choose. If we consider that everybody who is born of Muslim parents is supposed to be a Muslim, then we decide for them about what they are and what they should be and how they should act. For me, that's a big mistake.

So we have to shift from the concept of cultural minorities to the concept of faith communities. A faith community is based on personal, individual choice. We should respect this choice.

Here, there are the specific problems of France. France has no problem about acknowledging ethnic communities. But we have a problem about acknowledging faith communities, because our conception of secularism, *laïcité*, has two dimensions.

One is legal, the law. The law is not against religion. The law does allow religious communities to express themselves in the public space. The idea, which many people share in France, that the law means that religion is purely private, is not true. By law, you can, for example, ring bells in the public space, by definition. (You don't ring bells at home.) Of course, there are regulations. But you can have a religious procession. You can ask for religious holidays.

Then there is a big debate now about diets in schools, for instance, about the veil, about cemeteries, and things like that. But the debate is open. The law doesn't preclude anything.

But we have a second conception of *laïcité*, which is ideological, the idea that *laïcité* is some sort of political philosophy, which should be shared by everybody, every French citizen. If you don't stick to this ideology, then you are out of the political community.

But, first, this conception has no legal or constitutional basis. It is part of the legal culture, but it's not a legal fact. Secondly, it has never been true. France has always been divided between secularists on the one hand and people who wanted to express religious feeling in the public sphere. During the 1950s and 1960s, depending on if you were *laïc* or Catholic, you used to go sometimes to different schools, different sports clubs, for instance; you belonged to different teams and things like that. The society then was far more divided than the people tend to think now.

So we do not have the same problems as the British. The British have to give up this idea of "cultural minority" and to adopt the concept of faith communities, while in France we have acknowledged that there are faith communities and that these people could be as good citizens as the others.

So here we can see that the issue of Islam is a part of the reassessment of a common European identity. It's not a problem which is coming from outside suddenly. It is part of the reassessment of what citizenship means now in Europe, what nationalism means, and how we deal with the different sets of identities that an individual can choose for himself.

Thank you very much.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: *Merci, Monsieur le Professor.*

When you talk about individual choice and communities to Americans, we know what you are talking about. It sounds as if your very deep consideration of the issues is the solution. But can we go back to some of the problems that we hear about—on the political/economic front, for example, the violent youths. There were riots, and we were told they were connected to the lack of jobs. The problem of having a future within the society is not only a matter of religion; it's a matter of livelihood.

Secondly, we are very concerned about terrorism. A number of the terrorists have been the apostates, the ones who have converted to Islam.

Would you deal with these very salient problems?

OLIVIER ROY: About the youth riots in France, first, even if a huge part of the young rioters had a Muslim background, it was not true of all of them. It was a generational and social phenomenon, involving the suburban youth. But among the suburban youth, you have people from every ethnic background.

We can assess that. We looked at the guys who have been arrested by the police and went to court for participating in the riots. No more than 50 percent of the names were Muslims. You have Portuguese names, Spanish names, French names. Many people were from Africa, non-Muslim Africa.

For instance, we have the phenomenon of gangs in our suburbs now. But the gangs are based on belonging to a neighborhood and not belonging to a specific race or ethnicity or religion. The basis of the identity of these youngsters in the suburbs is the neighborhood.

Secondly, what these guys want is integration. At least they claim to want integration. For example, they complain of not being allowed to enter nightclubs, which is not a religious claim. It's a typical youth claim. They are not complaining about religious discrimination. Their parents may complain about religious discrimination, but not them.

There has been no, for example, Palestinian flag during these riots. They don't care about politics. They don't care about the Middle East.

Of course, sometimes they seem to be nihilists, not expecting a lot for the future. But they still consider that if there is a future, it's here, in France.

So these riots, for me, were the negative confirmation of the process of integration.

By the way, rioting to be recognized is typical of the French political culture. In this sense, they are very French. The taxi drivers, the fishermen—if you want to be listened to, you have to riot. So they are good French, for the moment.

The second question, about the converts. Al-Qaeda is the Muslim, quote/unquote, organization which has the highest percentage of converts. It's interesting. The most radical organization speaking about Islam is the organization with the highest level of converts.

Secondly, in al-Qaeda, converts do have responsibilities. You will never find a Muslim organization in Iran, in Egypt, or even, I would say, in Europe, where converts have responsibilities. In Spain, for instance, you have two Muslim organizations, because the converts and the Muslims by birth were unable to fit together. Each of them created its own organization.

Which means that traditional Islam is open to conversion, but still you have this idea that a true Muslim has to have a Muslim background and a convert is something of a maverick, an outcast. But that's not true of al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is a very modern organization, in a sense. It's clear that here you have the proof, the statistical proof, that violence is linked with deculturation—which, by the way, is a problem. You cannot know in advance who could turn to al-Qaeda. This is a big problem for the police.

The police understood a long time ago, at least in France, that the issue is not the Muslim community. The issue is how a local group of boys—and now, more and more, girls—could suddenly turn into a cell of a radical movement. The people in this group who are not Muslims, do convert when they join al-Qaeda.

So it is good news in the sense that it's not Islam *per se* which is bringing violence. It is bad news in the sense that we have a problem to spot now who could turn radical.

QUESTION: You touched, very interestingly, on the interplay between the state and faith and the French experience, reminding me of Cardinal [Ratzinger](#)'s comments on the spiritual roots of Europe, where he suggested that the Enlightenment in Europe had been accompanied by a rupture, particularly in Catholic countries, between the state and secularists, and faith-based communities. He spoke of the U.S. experience, where at the same time the U.S. Constitution was being formed in an atmosphere designed to allow faiths to flourish—[John Adams](#)'s famous comment that the U.S. Constitution was made for a moral and religious people.

You implied a contrast between the French experience and, for example, the Swedish and British experiences. Do you have any comments on the contrast, for example, between the French and U.S. experiences as far as assimilation versus integration of these minorities is concerned?

OLIVIER ROY: If we look at the Constitution, in fact, we could consider that France and the United States have the same conception of a strict separation of church and state. But if we look at the political culture of both countries, it's totally antagonistic. So here we have a clear example where the constitutional approach doesn't fit with the approach in terms of political culture.

Church and state are far less separated in Great Britain, in Germany, in Spain, almost everywhere in Europe—not to speak about Denmark—while in the States and France they are very separated. But in France this separation is the result of a struggle, of a fight, between the republican state and the Catholic church, while in the States it's the consequence of a consensus among religious minorities who emigrated to America.

The American political culture is full of religiosity, while the French political culture is secularist.

I am not a specialist on the United States, of course. But the problem is, what is the religiosity which is supposed to infuse the American political culture? Is it Christianity? There are some people who think like that. Or is it any faith? This is the debate. So the debate here is not about religion and political culture; it's more about which religions. Is Islam part of the game?

In France, the debate is largely—except among the Catholics, of course—about religion in general. It is not by chance that the laws which were aimed at the Muslims recently, in fact, did affect all religions.

Which explains also the very ambiguous attitude of the hierarchy of the Catholic church. On the one hand, the Catholic church now, after [John Paul II](#), thinks that Europe is Christian, that, in fact, Islam has no real role in Europe. Cardinal Ratzinger has been very clear on that: It's hospitable, but it's hospitable to *foreigners*. That could sum up the attitude of the Catholic church: They protect immigrants, but they don't want Muslim citizens. They want the immigrants to remain foreigners or to convert. There are conversions to the Catholic church, too.

So the Catholic church was not in favor of the law banning the veil from schools, because the Catholic church is in favor of the right to assert his or her religious identity in the public sphere. But on the other hand, the Catholic church does think that there are too many mosques, that the Muslims are too visible, and that we are a Christian continent, a view which is not shared by many Europeans. Secularism has won.

The attitude of the Catholic church is very ambiguous. On the one hand, they do consider that they are the real heirs of European history, that they are the soul of Europe. On the other hand, they consider themselves as a minority. We have the change of a majority mentality among the Catholic church to a minority mentality. The debate is very clear in Spain now, where the Catholic hierarchy cannot acknowledge that they are becoming a minority.

QUESTION: Thank you very much for your presentation.

You made the point that the official policy of the French government is integration. Could you, first of all, explain what that means, and secondly, whether that is the perception of all these young Muslims and other minority groups? Do they feel that the government is interested in integration, or do they feel that they are just this kind of sidelined minority that is going to remain discriminated against?

This also relates to the earlier question about employment and education opportunities, who gets into ENA [[École Nationale d'Administration](#), a university that produces most of France's elite] and so on and so forth.

OLIVIER ROY: Integration means to be a citizen like the others, not to have specific minority rights—linguistic, anything you want.

The reaction of the youth is not to say that they have a different cultural identity, but to accuse the government—and public opinion, by the way—of having double standards. That is a big issue. They say, "You want us to integrate, but you prevent this integration. You are creating barriers. You are not allowing us to do this and that and that and that." So they are complaining about discrimination as citizens, and not discrimination towards a cultural or religious minority.

QUESTION: I was wondering if you could clarify one of the implications of your argument which I wasn't quite clear on. You suggested the idea of a move from minorities to faith communities. I wasn't sure what that implication was for the European political cultures you discussed, whether you are talking about the idea that these become more like the United States, or the Anglo-American world—Canada and Australia, as well—where you have countries and cultures that are actually more permeable to religious faith groups and which consider normal the notion of a hyphenated identity, or whether you were rather suggesting, actually, the universalization of the French model—that is to say, one where each individual stands before the state without intermediate identities, but simply free to choose whatever they wish, without necessarily being part of a larger organization or one that is supported by things such as affirmative action, subsidies to communal institutions, or those sorts of things—in other words, whether your argument points towards the legitimacy and the legitimization of various forms of group identities and institutions, or whether, rather, it's the radical individualism which would be the place that your argument tends towards.

OLIVIER ROY: That is a very relevant question. I don't consider faith communities as another way to speak of cultural minorities. For me, it has nothing to do with a hyphenated identity—nothing at all. It's a purely religious identity. We are not speaking, I would say, of the same kind of space. The political space ignores the religious affiliations. But the faith communities have the right of religious freedom and expression.

So what does it mean, concretely? That we should give the Muslims, as a faith community, what we give to the other faiths. For instance, in Germany, the so-called church tax should also be for Muslims. Every country has its own way to deal with religion.

I am not advocating some sort of European harmonization of legislation concerning churches and religions, because it's so deeply entrenched in the history of each country that we cannot bring a new model. But accounting for the different models, we should treat Islam as we do the other faiths.

This has consequences, of course. I mentioned Spain. In France, it would mean, for instance, that in Alsace Lorraine—this French eastern province, if I can say that—where the state has a specific role, a German role, in religion, which means that the government is paying the salaries of the priests, the rabbis, and the pastors, it should pay the salaries of the imams, too. Let's be coequals.

We are slowly moving in this direction, and specifically with President [Sarkozy](#), because he is not a secularist. The idea is that either the president should keep himself outside any religion—he should not go to religious celebrations—or, if he goes to one, he should go to all the others. That is what Sarkozy is doing now—it is his own choice—which is very controversial in France.

The fact that Sarkozy, when he spoke at the United Nations, said something about freedom of religion in the world is something totally new. I am not a historian, but I guess that no French politician speaking at the United Nations has ever spoken before about freedom of religion in the world.

That is the way we should go. If a Catholic priest is invited by the local authorities, the imam should be invited too —things like that.

Then we have the problem of holidays. One solution would be to grant as many holidays as religions—but that's not the trend now; the trend is to get fewer holidays—or to allow the people of minority faith groups to take their own holidays, which was already done in France. It was not new. The Jews had the right—it was informal. It's not written in the law. It was customary. The Armenians are

allowed to celebrate religious things on their own dates, and not the same dates as the Catholics—things like that.

We have consideration of public order, by definition. But I think the issue is equality, equality in treatment.

QUESTION: There are a couple of issues here. One is the adaptation or assimilation of Islamic people, Arabic people, and so on. But in the United States and Europe, there are organizations which are dedicated to amassing funds and supporting jihad and the war on Western culture. In those areas, the mullahs of the various mosques are busy recruiting the restless youth on behalf of this kind of activity.

How do you determine this? How do you combat the influence of ideology among groups that are disaffected already, just out of the nature of being young people?

OLIVIER ROY: Yes, there are Islamic groups who oppose integration—either, I would say, in favor of militancy, jihadism, or just in favor of some sort of separateness—"we Muslims cannot live under the same kind of government." As always, militants are far more active than moderates, and militants speak louder than moderates.

Here we have two issues. One is to address these groups according to the law and according to security considerations. To what extent do they breach the law in terms of hate speech, for instance, and so on?

But the legislation is there. We have the laws to prevent things like that.

The second issue is, what is their impact on, I would say, the average Muslim population? That is the real issue, of course.

For me, it's a big mistake to constantly speak to Muslims and say, "You should not become a terrorist," because now, if we speak of Islam only in consideration of the potential threat of terrorism, then [bin Laden](#) has won, because we use the same terms as him. We make bin Laden the hero of the Muslim community if we always consider that the issue is Islamist terrorism.

The way bin Laden is working, it's always some sort of teasing. He is always comparing himself with President [Bush](#). The day President Bush makes bin Laden the public enemy, bin Laden has won, with very little means; he has won.

So we should address the Muslim population with what are the stakes and the considerations of this Muslim population. As I said, when you discuss with Muslims in Europe—I mean the mainstream, of course, not the small fringe of radicals—they don't care about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; they don't care about Iraq. They care about what it means to be a Muslim here and now. They care about the mosques. They care about halal food. They care about racism. They care about all that.

I spend some time every year touring local Muslim groups, organizations, and so on. Frankly speaking, they don't speak politics, because they don't care about politics. The people who are fighting about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in France are not the mainstream Muslim organizations, in Europe at least. They are the leftist organizations. In these leftist organizations you may have some Muslims, of course. But in France, when you have a demonstration in Paris in favor of Palestine, you have 10,000, 15,000 people, most of them aging Trotskyites; very few Muslims—very few Muslims. If Palestine was such a problem for the Muslim community in France, you would have 500,000 Muslims on the streets of Paris. We have millions of Muslims in France. They don't care. They just don't care.

But we are always projecting on them, "You should condemn Hamas." If we ask them to condemn Hamas, it means that we are identifying them with the Palestinians. They are right not to say anything about Hamas, to the extent that they don't say anything about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As French citizens, you may be a supporter of Hamas, of Palestine, but it has nothing to do with religion. As I said,

most people who are supporting Palestine in France are the usual leftists, and some rightists, for other reasons.

QUESTION: I, too, want to thank you for your presentation.

I would like to go back to the original question. You said that rioting is very French, and when people have a problem, they riot. This is not unique to France. It seems to me that rioting is a universal expression of despair—not all the time, but often. I think that the problem, at least the way I perceive it and the way it was conveyed in our press and in other press when you had your riots a couple of years ago, is one of despair.

There is no question that the Muslims are segregated. They live in slums, in a ghetto. We have had these problems with our inner cities. They complain that they can't get into a nightclub. I would suggest that it's not the nightclub so much; it is that they feel discriminated against. They are discriminated against. They are looked down on by French society. They are not accepted by French society.

I think this is an expression of a sense of alienation, more than anything else.

I am not French; you are. You have, of course, a better sense of what is going on in your society. But my question is, what are you doing, not so much to influence the government's approach to these Muslim kids who have a sense of despair, but to educate the French population about the problems that these people are having in your society and trying to get them to be less prejudiced and more accepting of them, as we have in our country over many, many decades and generations? We have been trying to work this out through civil rights discussions and organizations.

I think the American public—there are, of course, many people who are still prejudiced. There is still a race problem here. But it has gotten much, much better, because the population has been educated and is more aware of the sense of despair and the reasons for the despair.

What are you doing to educate the French people about these problems?

OLIVIER ROY: You educate people, you need to educate them on the basis of an analysis of reality, of what is going on. If you educate them on myths, it doesn't work. And what you are telling me is a myth, the myth of Muslims being a minority estranged from French society. As I said, the problem for these youths in the suburbs is not that they are Muslims. Many of them are not Muslims at all. So we have a problem of social discrimination towards a second-generation population in the suburbs, which is true. But it has nothing to do with Islam.

For example, we have a Muslim middle class. This Muslim middle class, they don't consider themselves as belonging to the same world as these youths. They would be very upset if we introduced the idea of them belonging to a minority.

The middle class of Muslim origin is very opposed to the idea of speaking of a "Muslim minority" in France, for very good reasons.

One is, they don't want to be ascribed a religious identity. Many of them drink wine and don't want to be called Muslim just because their parents were Muslims.

So the issue is not to use the term "Muslim" to define the population which is discriminated against in the suburbs. Yes, we have a population which is discriminated against. But if we call them Muslims and speak about discriminating against Muslims, it doesn't work. Then we create the ghetto in doing that, because we assign a religious identity to people who don't take this religious identity for themselves.

For me, the issues of discrimination should be disconnected, and are disconnected, from the issues of religion. It's not a matter of religion. They are not discriminated against because they are Muslim; they

are discriminated against because they have dark skin. That's all. A light-skinned Muslim has no problem in France.

So the comparison with the issue of racism—that doesn't work.

Another thing is the high rate of intermarriages. Once you have a high rate of intermarriages, it's very difficult to speak of a closet minority. It doesn't work.

So the people are very attached to individualism, to the right to escape any assignment to a minority. They protest because they are not recognized as individuals, because they are tagged "Muslims" or "foreigners" when they want to enter the labor market and things like that.

So we have to recognize the call for individual freedom and not a call for the recognition of a cultural minority. We have to teach people about freedom, citizenship, things like that, about religious tolerance, but not about what is a Muslim community, which doesn't exist.

JOANNE MYERS: Thank you very much. I think it's always difficult to distinguish between religion, politics, and culture. I thank you for opening the discussion.

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