



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN DENMARK

The development in Denmark in the last couple of years with respect to islamophobia and the legal rights for migrant workers and legal immigrants have been followed with great interest in the rest of the world. The news world wide have generally been focused on “negative news” where Denmark in some cases has been portrayed as a very conservative society where Muslim immigrants or Muslims in general have very restricted rights and are more or less antagonized by the government. This is not the case. The Danish government has an increased attention on the need of integrating immigrants in all aspects of society. Denmark is one of the countries in the EU which regrettably has the lowest integration of their immigrants. With the huge need of labour it is also realised that the immigrants represent an unused resource. Thus, the government, and especially the Ministry of Integration has started initiatives directed at improving education in the public schools, improving integration in the private and public sectors and other parts of the society.

At the NGO level there are also several national and local bodies which are more active on improving integration in collaboration with governmental institutions.

However, in spite of this positive development, the political atmosphere in Denmark for the last 7-8 years has been affected by a general alienation of the Muslim minority in Denmark. There are at the moment a total of 200.000 Muslims in Denmark corresponding to 4 % of the general population.

Even if it is not possible to draw general conclusions based on single outburst from individuals, the following statement from a member of the European Parliament is a good indicator of the political atmosphere. Mogens Camre, a member of the European Parliament from the Danish Peoples Party stated in September 2008 at their annual meeting: “Islam cannot be integrated. Islam will dominate Europe. Islam is incompatible with our values. Therefore, Islam should be expelled from Europe.”

And in another statement a few years before he said “Islam does not belong in Europe and our first priority should be to repatriate the Muslims”.

In view of the two remarks from the member of the European Parliament, Mogens Camre, it is interesting to read the recommendation no. 1805 point 5 from the Council of Europe in 2007 under the heading “Blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion”. In the recommendation it says “...in a democratic society, religious groups must tolerate, as must other groups, critical public statements and debate about their activities, teachings and beliefs, provided that such criticism does not amount to intentional and gratuitous insults or hate speech and does not constitute incitement to disturb the peace or to violence and discrimination against adherents of a particular religion.”

The problem regarding the political atmosphere in Denmark is that the political party represented by Mr. Camre is also the one party which ensures the two governmental parties a majority in parliament. Thus, the collaboration with Danish Peoples Party is essential for the existence of the government in Denmark. This has over the years resulted in a climate in the media and amongst politicians where statements like the ones above are seen on a daily basis.

The political reaction to the recent Metock verdict from the European Court of Justice on July 2008 is an example of the political dynamics in Denmark. The problem for the current government is that the rigidity of the rules established by the parliament in Copenhagen must coexist with the European laws of free circulation, which includes the right to move between member states with one's family, regardless of their nationality.

In recent years, Danish citizens who are married with non-EU citizens have been forced to go to Sweden, where the national rules about family reunification are less rigid, and then return to Denmark on the basis of the free movement of citizens within the EU. In order to put a stop to this practice, the Danish authorities established a set of laws for re-entry into Denmark. These new conditions were voted unacceptable by the Court in Luxembourg.

Thereafter the government had to comply with the ultimatum from the Danish Peoples Party (they would not continue the legislative process focused on the financial policy for 2009), and therefore developed a new set of rules to restrict immigration from non-EU countries.

This example, with the consequences of the Metock-verdict is not directly related to the islamophobic development in Denmark, but gives a good description of the political dynamics in Denmark with the collaboration between the two governmental parties and the far-right party, Danish Peoples Party.

As a result of the development in Denmark during the last 7-8 years there is now a serious growth in the Danish Nazi-party and other extreme right movements. Movement recruiting many members among the youth. They are known for their outspoken, offensive and clear racist, anti-semitic and Islamophobic views.

As we hope is clear in the above there are positive developments in Denmark, however we encourage that the ODIHR goes into a constructive dialogue with the Danish governmental institutions focused on the following recommendation no. 1805 point 2 from the Council of Europe in 2007 under the heading "Blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion" *"The Assembly underlines the importance of respect for, and understanding of, cultural and religious diversity in Europe and throughout the world and recognises the need for ongoing dialogue. Respect and understanding can help avoid frictions within society and between individuals. Every human being must be respected, independently of religious beliefs."*

Sincerely

Ismail Gögenur

Danish Turkish Islamic Foundation

Vakif@diyanetvakfi.dk