



Addressing/Challenging Radicalisation and extremism with Interfaith dialogue for Peace: *what works?*

27-28 January 2016

Meeting Report

Report and Facilitation by

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This document collects the main points raised at the 'Addressing/Challenging Radicalisation and Extremism with Interfaith Dialogue for Peace: What works?' high-level meeting in Rome on 26-28 January 2016, as well as the main recommendations and suggestions coming out of it. The views expressed in this paper are neither those of the organisers (Nizami Ganjavi International Center; Italian Society for International Organization) nor those of the facilitator (mediatEUr, the European Forum for International Mediation and Dialogue). They should not, at any point, be taken as the official position of either the organisers/facilitator or the participants.

INTRODUCTION

The terrorist attacks in Beirut, Paris and elsewhere have underscored the worldwide sources and the global effects of religious radicalisation. With faith as a recurring rationale behind civil strife and political violence, religion is often considered an influential, sometimes a detrimental factor in today's international conflicts, maybe even more than facts warrant, as religion is only one of the several interrelated causal factors that propel people, societies, nations, state and non-state actors to wage war.

On 26-28 January 2016, more than thirty eminent leaders-including current and former Presidents, Prime ministers and renowned scholars from the East and the West as well as religious representatives-gathered in Rome to discuss the issue of radicalisation and extremism in the 21st century and the ways interfaith dialogue could address it. As such, we see interfaith dialogue as a forum to ameliorate conflict, and to encourage reconciliation in situations where religion is not the driving force.

Organising dialogue across religious boundaries would thus enable people to perform their sacred duty as peacemakers within their respective faith traditions¹.

This meeting took place in the Grand Hotel Minerva in Rome, with the opening session being hosted at the Italian Senate, in the spectacular Sala Zucari of the Palazzo Giustiniani, as well as an official ceremony hosted by the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, with interventions from the Nizami Ganjavi International Centre Board of Trustees' co-chairs, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga and Ismail Serageldin.

Throughout the conference, participants tackled the pivotal question of what could be learned from the past and present practice of interfaith dialogue, while discussing the ways international policymakers could elevate interfaith dialogue as a genuine instrument for conflict.

¹ See also David, R. Smock. (ed.) (2002) *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, Conclusions.

In addition, leaders discussed and debated the roots of radicalisation and extremism, and how and why religions are used to convert individuals to extreme thoughts and radicalisation. In this context, the role of the State in relation to faith and religious freedom was critically examined.

Interconnectivity, the role of the media, and how the media is being used and manipulated, creates more questions and a lacunae in the field of communication that religious as well as political leaders need to be well aware of, but can be translated into an opportunity for enhanced understanding and dialogue between faiths.

A core theme that emerged was the specific role played by young people and women, both as innocent targets and radicalised actors of extremist groups, and the ways they could participate in, and strengthen, interfaith dialogue.

Thanks to the committed inputs, profound analyses, honest dialogue and firm recommendations by participations, the conference represents a pivotal contribution to the debate on radicalisation, extremism and the role of interfaith dialogue; it paved the way for further, deeper discussions during the 4th Global Baku Forum on 10-11 March 2016.

The three-day high-level meeting, an initiative by the Nizami Ganjavi International Center was co-organised by the Italian Society for International Organization and facilitated by mediatEUr.

For additional information, such as photos and transcripts of individual speeches, please visit: <http://bakuforum2016.com/event-01/information-on-event-01/>

For information about the Global Baku Forum, please visit:

www.bakuforum2016.com

“THE ESSENTIAL TWENTY”

20 proposals by Participants of the NGIC Rome meeting on Actions to prevent and address radicalisation and extremism:

1. Reaching out to non-believers and involving them in interfaith dialogue;
2. Encouraging the phenomenon of ‘Shared Shrines’ anyãof One’ in each country, which would host different religions’ places of worship under the same roof;
3. Promoting all activities in the area of interfaith dialogue at regional and international levels;
4. Preparing tomorrow’s elites in the MENA region in order to prevent that growing hatred against the West be exploited by terrorists;
5. Preventing interfaith dialogue from being hijacked by religious fundamentalists;
6. Ensuring worldwide cultural security through respect of all religions under UNESCO;
7. Funding proper education everywhere so that youth can learn about religious tolerance and respect towards diversity;
8. Identifying and addressing the grassroots and non-spiritual issues which fuel hatred, prevent acceptance and thus lead to radicalisation;
9. Fostering the emergence of multicultural, integration-based societies;
10. Enacting secularism in every country;
11. Monitoring the factors that could lead to the radicalisation of domestic youth;
12. Implementing measures aimed at managing terrorism in the long run instead of trying to defeat it;
13. Initiating a spiritual globalisation through interconnectivity ;
14. Fostering peace- and institution-building through social media;
15. Sharing knowledge about the content of the Holy Books of all faiths at school and in the public sphere, through the diffusion of ONE (educational) book gathering the main features of every religions;
16. Never undermining any faith in favour of another;
17. Investing in countries which generate migration through a second Marshall Plan;
18. Engaging women and young people, both natives and migrants, in interfaith endeavours in order to prevent their radicalisation;
19. For religious establishments, acknowledging the evolution of modern societies and interpreting religious principles accordingly, as well as closely monitoring and combatting fundamentalists who preach hatred and violence;
20. Coupling interfaith dialogue with interfaith action initiatives, such as the Order of Malta’s Caravan Project in Lebanon through which Christians, Muslims, Jews and Druze are living, interacting with and learning about each other.



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Agenda of the meeting

Addressing/Challenging Radicalisation and Extremism with Interfaith Dialogue for Peace: What works?

Nizami Ganjavi International Center & Italian Society for International Organization Initiative for Global Dialogue in a Multipolar World

27th of January

- 10:00-11:30** Responding to radicalisation and extremism through interfaith dialogue (Opening Ceremony at the Italian Senate)
- 11:30-13:00** Conflict and peace within religions: What should political leaders learn from history that is relevant to today's issues?
- 14:30-16:00** The sources of radicalisation and violent extremism: How does religion fit in?
- 17:00** Official Reception hosted by His Excellency Mr. Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic (Quirinale Palace)

28th of January

- 09:00-10:30** Interconnectivity and the global search for spirituality: What is society looking for and what is the role of the State?
- 11:00-12:30** Balance. The role of gender and young people in radicalisation and extremism: Inclusion and exclusion in interfaith dialogue
- 14:00-15:30** We are One: Statements from leaders of all faiths on the role of religion in building world peace
- 15:30-16:00** Conclusions





Responding to radicalisation and extremism through interfaith dialogue

Speakers

- » *Pietro Grasso, President of the Italian Senate, 2013- ...*
- » *Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Italian Republic, 2006-2015*
- » *Franco Frattini Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2002-2004 / 2008-2011; President of the SIOI*
- » *Rosen Plevneliev President of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2012- ...*
- » *Gjorge Ivanov President of the Republic of Macedonia, 2009- ...*
- » *Vaira Vike-Freiberga President of Latvia, 1999-2007; Co-Chair of NGIC*
- » *Paul Tighe Adjunct Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, 2015- ...*
- » *Michele Valensise Secretary General of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2012- ...*
- » *Ismail Serageldin Founding Director of Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2002-...; Co-Chair of NGIC*

“Terrorism has no religion, radicalisation has no religion, marginalisation has no religion: it is against religion.”

Rosen Plevneliev

What do radicalisation and extremism mean in the 21st century? Do they constitute a threat to religion? How? In the first opening panel, participants clearly stated that terrorism was the negation of all the achievements of successive civilisations and that killing in the name of God could be labelled as a blasphemy undermining all faiths.

It is clear that, in order to fight terrorism, the underlying roots of radicalisation and extremism need to be identified and tackled. According to Franco Frattini, one way to achieve this is through a global renaissance focusing on the human person and the respect of human life and dignity, where believers from the three Abrahamic religions could share the common principle according to which the human person is at the centre of the universe in each of their religion. Such an endeavour driven by religious authorities would greatly complement the global defence and promotion of human rights that most governments pursue today.

Invoking childhood memories of a time when people from all faiths were peacefully practicing their religion and living together, participants of this forum underlined the importance of respecting human rights and people's own identities, in all their diversity, as an essential feature of a peaceful communal life. Effective and closer integration is the core of this. As a unique peace project, the European Union offers a recipe, a narrative for other regions of the world, and an opportunity for interfaith dialogue. In any community worldwide, tolerance, pragmatism and openness must be fostered, as terrorism often starts where integration has failed.

Enactment of double standards and misuse of secular power by religious leaders and of religion by government officials were identified as driving factors leading to intolerance and rejection of cultural diversity, hence leading to xenophobia, exclusion and marginalisation. The latter fuel radicalisation and extremism and complicate interfaith dialogue, notably in poor, marginalised areas.

Speakers in this panel suggested that an effective way to avoid such pitfalls is to actively work towards the creation of interreligious communities within which similar values would act as a bridge between faiths. This would pave a way for interreligious dialogue between and within communities rather than necessarily achieving religious syncretism¹, which negates the differences between faiths.

¹ Religious syncretism is the fusion of diverse religious beliefs and practices.

“We don't want to have several religious shades of grey but respect for religious differences.”

Vaira Vike-Freiberga

To overcome religious differences does not mean that we have to homogenise our societies. Indeed, this would represent an attempt at utopia. Any such efforts inevitably raise difficulties regarding their inherent differences and the necessity of respecting them. All pluralistic communities, in order to survive as such, need to be based on the moral principles of non-violence and decency and respect for the other, whether natives or not. Globalisation, urbanisation and other socio-economic aspects have created a sense of isolation and a feeling of loneliness, which are common features of our modern societies, and have fuelled an increase in the search for spirituality.

In today's world, people seek a sense of identity, be it through religious or other means. In order to avoid marginalisation from society, more acceptance and tolerance are needed, not less.

As such, so participants argue, dialogue is a cultural phenomenon and an inherently religious feature; dialogue is needed between believers and non-believers, but above all amongst believers of different faiths, to allow for “a cultural encounter”. Paul Tighe adds that courage and humility, core religious values shared by all faiths, are great enablers of dialogue and communication, which can be further enhanced by sharing more common values.

“Our commitment to interfaith dialogue aims at respecting and not surpassing the difference, because the goal of the dialogue is to help us to live with our deepest religious differences without neglecting or surpassing the difference.”

Gjorge Ivanov, President of the Republic of Macedonia

What, then, is interfaith dialogue? What are its features, actors and process? Farida Allaghi pointed out the fact that such interreligious initiatives started around 50 years ago but have been largely unsuccessful, despite the several instances existing today; she therefore proposes to merge all the interreligious initiatives and dialogues occurring throughout the world under a single institution, which would prove more efficient. Rather than fear about other religions that divides our people today, creating and supporting extremists and radicals, practicing interfaith dialogue could bring hope to people again.

“Religion has always been about peace, not mayhem or war. The question is thus: How can great faiths of our world engage in interfaith dialogue to build peace?”

Ismail Serageldin

Strengthening interfaith dialogue means not excluding religion from the public sphere and, at the same time, accepting the rules aimed at preserving religious freedom and State secularism. Ismail Serageldin proposed that, since extremists use religion to legitimise their actions, political authorities should use interfaith dialogue in order to promote peace. However, it is clear to the participants that in order to combat radicalisation, interreligious initiatives are not sufficient in themselves, and other non-religious and temporal guarantees, such as socio-economic opportunities, respect for freedoms and safety/security from the State, need to complement and create the foundations of a healthy modern society that is ready to tolerate and engage in dialogue with other religions.

Action points proposed in this panel:

»

Reaching out to non-believers and including them in interfaith dialogue.

»

Encouraging the phenomenon of ‘Shared Shrines’ anywhere they exist and supporting the establishment of ‘Houses of One’ in each country, which would host different religions’ places of worship under the same roof.

»

Promoting all activities in the area of interfaith dialogue at regional and international levels.

»

Preparing tomorrow’s elites in the MENA region in order to prevent that growing hatred against the West be exploited by terrorists.



Conflict and peace within religions: What should political leaders learn from history that is relevant to today's issues?

Speakers

- » Emil Constantinescu, President of Romania, 1996-2000
- » Bronislaw Komorowski, President of Poland, 2010-2015
- » Ivo Josipovic, President of Croatia, 2010-2015
- » Abdulaziz Al-Twajjri, Director General of ISESCO, 1991-...
- » Paul Bhatti, Federal Minister of National Harmony and Minorities Affairs of Pakistan, 2011-2013

“In Islam, killing one human being is like killing the whole humanity.”

Paul Bhatti

The history of the world is filled with wars involving religion; the persecutions and massacres of Calvinists in Germany, mirrored by what is currently happening in Iraq and Syria; the feud between Catholics and Protestants in France; the killings of Orthodox Christians during the Soviet era; or the partition of a multicultural, multireligious society between India, Pakistan, Kashmir and Bangladesh. Today, the Arab Spring revolutions, once a symbol of hope for increased democratisation and freedom, have failed, in part because of religious discrepancies. However, so speakers argue, we have yet to learn from a history which is rich with evidence of what misery the lack of interfaith dialogue can bring.



Culture binds and distinguishes societies. Protecting their depth and diversity requires a certain cultural security (under the protective monitoring of UNESCO) to highlight the highest common denominator between peoples; participants argued that faith could be such a denominator. At the same time, several participants acknowledged that religion has proved to be a source of threats to the world, as it caused wars throughout history, and been instrumentalised to exclude, marginalise and generate hatred.

If peace and love is at the heart of most, if not all religions, how is it so that they have played such a role in violence and war throughout history? The question does not pertain to whether a particular religion is inherently violent, but instead to whether religious and political leaders have the means to act to prevent feuds and wars using religion to legitimise their actions. Farida Allaghi points out that, unfortunately, most of the time, vested interests of political and religious leaders prevented them from effectively acting against radicalisation and extremism.

Thus, when it comes to religious violence, the debate should not be about "radical secularisation vs. religious fundamentalism" but rather about how government officials and religious authorities can find a 'middle way' which preserves both pluralism and religious freedom.

"We have to restrain ourselves from trying to change religions because it is not necessary to ensure peaceful cohabitation between religious communities within one country."

Bronislaw Komorowski

The current migrant crisis highlights the disrespect towards religious values that has been fuelling feelings of hatred and anger. Because of the reluctance of several societies to accept religious differences, islamophobia and antisemitism are surging, instilling more hatred and distrust between people of different faiths, possibly causing a vicious circle dynamic that is detrimental to the development of humanity.

According to Abdulaziz Al-Twajiri, one way to protect the coexistence of religions would be to enshrine its respect under international law, so that believers would be equally protected anywhere in the world.

It is clear to the participants of the Rome meetings that education and subsequent acceptance of diversity are of pivotal importance to fighting extremism and preventing radicalisation. Led by the thought that "terrorism usually starts where education fails", a common theme discussed during the

meeting, participants underlined the need to offer an education favourable to religious tolerance to all young people. It was pointed out that, ironically, many of the leaders of fundamentalist movements were Western-educated and yet were still preaching radicalisation and extremism.

"The world is neglecting the roots of radicalisation and terrorism; yet, it is busy fighting those on the grounds."

Abdulaziz Al-Twajiri

The conclusion in this panel was that, when it comes to issues involving religion, governments predominantly try to deal with the problem on the ground but rarely with the roots of the problem: socioeconomic factors are often the main drivers of radicalisation but they are not necessarily addressed by domestic and foreign governments alike. Consequently, along with prevention, the conditions for sustainable development and economic prosperity must be pursued everywhere, through value-based actions, effective institutions and an inclusive community of change-makers. Although these are not new but recurrent thoughts, they must be addressed with united determination.

Action points proposed in this panel:

- » Preventing interfaith dialogue from being hijacked by religious fundamentalists;
- » Ensuring worldwide cultural security through respect of all religions under UNESCO;
- » Funding proper education everywhere so that youth can learn about religious tolerance and respect towards diversity;
- » Identifying and addressing the grassroots and non-spiritual issues which fuel hatred, prevent acceptance and thus lead to radicalisation.

The sources of radicalisation and violent extremism: How does religion fit in?

Speakers:

- » Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of Latvia, 1999-2007; Co-Chair of NGIC
- » Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League, 2001-2011
- » Iveta Radicova, Prime Minister of Slovakia, 2010-2012
- » Rexhep Meidani, President of Albania, 1997-2002
- » Stjepan Mesic, President of Croatia, 2000-2010

“A world without faith is neither better nor safer. History has shown that atheist governments could be ruthless and cruel as well.”

Bronislaw Komorowski

As pointed out by Dr. Vike-Freiberga, human violence is often also driven by psychobiological factors that influence the aggressive instincts of a person. In addition, sociobiological factors, such as the need to belong to a certain community, complement the psychobiological ones; the combination of these factors is likely to trigger violence towards so-called 'out-groups'. This instinctive behaviour explains the use of religion by extremists to radicalise youngsters. These factors are not only instrumentalised by religions but also by ideologies such as Bolshevism.

In this context, Viktor Yushchenko reminded participants that, at the beginning of the 20th century, places of worship had been destroyed and the Orthodox Church had been forced to 'go underground' to escape the attacks of the Communist government: a political ideology - and not a religious one - had ignited a civil war in order to settle its one - party system.



Amre Moussa emphasised that the West bore a strong responsibility in the current confusion between politics and religion—and thus, in the recourse to religion as a sociological factor of radicalisation—notably through the emphasis put on a prospective “clash of civilisations” according to which Islam would threaten Western societies. Such a self-fulfilling prophecy could explain the surge of fundamentalist groups over the last decades, and particularly that of ISIS.

“This is not a ‘clash of civilisations’: it is a failure of the policies of inclusion and integration. It is a failure of multiculturalism.”

Rexhep Meidani

It also surfaced from the discussions that societies have yet to adapt to the realities of an interconnected 21st century. The issue of religious tolerance today relates to an ‘assimilation vs. integration’ debate: either a country keeps its assimilation model, a one-way process aiming at absorbing foreigners into a single, uniform community which negates diversity, or it adopts an integration model, a two-way process leading to reciprocal acceptance by natives and migrants which preserves yet blends cultural differences. And here, the integration model offers better prospects of acceptance for religious diversity, as it reduces the risks of marginalisation and discrimination.

Stjepan Mesić underlined that laïcité-or secularism-according to which religion does not belong to politics and politics does not belong to religion, should be an essential feature of any multicultural, integration-based society because it is the only principle that ensures both pluralism and religious freedom.

This, this separation between religious and secular authorities, complementing but not replacing one another, is fundamental to securing domestic religious diversity. This will prevent certain religions from falling into fundamentalist hands.

“No religion is, by itself, responsible for extremism. The blame is on the teachers and preachers who distort the peaceful message of religions.”

Stjepan Mesić

Violent extremism, as expressed through radical religions, cannot not be solved by a ‘War on Terror’. Like any other ‘war’, according to Iveta Radicova, it does not solve the issue at its roots, highlighting five factors that need to be taken into account when addressing radicalisation and extremism:

- » *While terrorism can be managed, it cannot be defeated. Reducing terrorist threats in the long run is an ongoing endeavour.*
- » *The risk is already in Europe, for every single European country has its own set of angry youngsters who could potentially be radicalised.*
- » *Defeating ISIS will not make terrorism disappear, for another movement would take over until the root causes of radicalisation and extremism are addressed.*
- » *Despite its obvious violence, terrorism is a relatively minor threat compared to those which threaten humanity (global health, climate change mitigation, etc.).*
- » *One need, before acting, is to make sure that the actions one takes will improve the situation and not make it worse.*

Action points proposed in this panel:

- » *Fostering the emergence of multicultural, integration-based societies;*
- » *Enacting secularism in every country;*
- » *Monitoring the factors that could lead to the radicalisation of domestic youngsters;*
- » *Implementing measures aimed at managing terrorism on the long run instead of trying to defeat it.*

Interconnectivity and the global search for spirituality: What is society looking for and what is the role of the State?

Speakers

- » Ismail Serageldin, Founding Director of Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2002-...; Co-Chair of NGIC
- » Valdis Zatlers, President of Latvia, 2007-2011
- » Petar Stoyanov, President of Bulgaria, 1997-2002

“The problem of traditional religions is that they are dominated by old people who are out of touch with new technologies.”

Ismail Serageldin

The importance of faith has increased in today's world a result of an ever-expanding globalisation. At the same time, interconnectedness, a product of technological innovation and progress, has led to the progressive emergence of a homogenised common culture. This dual phenomenon, which affects traditional identities and values at their core, has led to a global search for new identities and values. This is happening in a world where more than 60% of the population is under 25 and cannot fathom a reality without the Internet; a world where there are more mobile telephones than people, and which is experiencing interconnectedness at a level never seen before, as pointed out by President Stoyanov.

While challenging traditional religious identities and values, globalisation and interconnectedness are seen by some scholars as an opportunity for people from different faiths to meet, interact and thus be more respectful of each other's religions. Other scholars, fearing a 'cultural homogenisation', consider



that this dual phenomenon is causing a deterioration of moral standards, a decline of spirituality and a cultural breakdown. Valdis Zatlers highlighted that technologies and social media had been great tools of destruction, notably during the Arab Spring revolutions, but that one had yet to see a concrete example of successful institution-building through social media and new technologies.

Although acknowledging the risks of tensions and conflicts that interaction between different cultures entails, participants agreed that globalisation and interconnectedness were a great opportunity for world peace. They offer the possibility to foster mutual understanding through interreligious encounters and interfaith dialogue; both can progressively lead to breaking down the religious barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust and suspicion.

“Interfaith dialogue is not about taking away or brushing aside differences. It does not aim at coming to a common belief. It is further not a way of converting the other but rather increasing mutual understanding and trust.”

Petar Stoyanov

Maybe, as President Stoyanov noted, it is time for a spiritual globalisation, implying that all religions promote and communicate spiritual values in order to lead communities to peaceful coexistence. This is crucial because globalisation and interconnectedness have also contributed to reinforcing traditional and nationalistic identities.

In order to explain this dangerous pitfall of globalisation, Dr. Ismail Serageldin, introduced his theories of the ‘echo-chamber’ and the ‘vortex of lies’.

Echo-chambers can be understood as online chatrooms that are used not to diffuse new ideas but rather to share and reinforce like-minded persons’ own opinions through the echo phenomenon. This is not a new phenomenon, since it already existed in Russia during the Soviet era and was organised by the Orthodox Church leadership. Today new information and communication technologies - notably social media - are making echo-chambers a much more dangerous and insidious element, since they allow anyone, anywhere to connect online and entrap both like-minded and innocent persons into a vortex of lies from which it is extremely difficult, even impossible, to escape.

“The disaffected, the unhappy, the marginalised and the victimised must be reached before they are sucked into a vortex of lies.”

Ismail Serageldin

Dr. Serageldin further explained that vortices of lies were extremely dangerous because they were used by victims of indoctrination as counter-arguments, reinforcing the sound of the echo-chamber each time outsiders tried to reach them and debunk the lies with sound evidence. Since disillusioned, marginalised youngsters - who look for a higher cause - are the most sought-after prey of extremists, it is crucial that those still unconverted are reached before falling into the vortices, for preaching to the converted is not a viable option. Thus, pluralism and free speech on a wide range of issues and ideas as well as diversity must be strengthened and reinforced to counter the vicious effects of echo-chambers, so he stresses.

Thus temporal (political and economic leaders) and spiritual authorities should work together to emphasise that only secular citizenship in a pluralistic society could enable any believer to practice her/his faith in the private sphere. The spiritual has become more important than ever in a world where material well-being and the accumulation of wealth have become the measure of success in life.

“If religious and political leaders are able to work together, they will prevent extremists’ derives.”

Yahya Pallavicini

Participants also pointed out that political correctness and overzealousness in Western countries were contributing to the undermining of one faith, Christianity, facing the hostility of Islam, and that the perception of such a weakening was causing an increase in Islamophobia. In a world of equal faiths, they said, it is crucial that no religion be undermined in favour of another and that secular authorities do not discriminate between them. Abdulaziz Al-Twajiri added that, in order to evidence Islam’s inherent religious tolerance, the Charter of Yathrib, drafted by the Prophet Muhammad after his arrival in Medina, should be showcased worldwide, as freedom of religion for all citizens, non-discrimination against non-Muslims and consultation among citizens were some of the core elements featured in this Constitution that provided for the establishment of a multireligious state in Medina.

In light of the confusion between radicals and moderates depending on the warring parties concerned, it is important to acknowledge that, irrespective of the ideology defended, those who value human life, who listen to and respect each other, and who do not kill, should be considered as moderates, while those who are ready to murder people should be called radicals.

Action points raised in this panel:

- » Initiating a spiritual globalisation through interconnectivity ;
- » Fostering peace- and institution-building through social media;
- » Sharing knowledge about the content of the Holy Book of all faiths at school and in the public sphere, through the diffusion of ONE (educational) book gathering the main features of every religions;
- » Never undermining any faith in favour of another one.



Balance. The role of gender and young people in radicalisation and extremism: Inclusion and exclusion in interfaith dialogue

Speakers

- » Linda Lanzillotta, Vice President of the Italian Senate, 2013-...
- » Albrecht von Boeselager, Grand Chancellor, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sovereign Order of Malta, 2014-...
- » Petru Lucinschi, President of Moldova, 1997-2001
- » Hikmet Cetin, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1991-1994

The current refugee and migrant crisis is not just a simple demographic challenge: the current experience exhibits the multiple state weaknesses of countries from which refugees and migrants originate. Therefore, according to participants, immigration quotas are not the solution, for they do not fix the combination of socioeconomic and political factors at the root of the issue; only direct investment in the concerned countries, through carefully tailored development projects, could address those root causes.

As pointed out by Petru Lucinschi, in countries where more than 30% of the population is under the age of 25, tensions can occur given the acute socio-economic hardships that this group is experiencing nowadays. It is crucial to pay attention to countries where demographics shows a high percentage of youngsters, for they are potential victims of extremism.

Acknowledging that radical movements come from both outside and inside Western societies – mainly ignited by unemployment, economic and social difficulties as well as isolation and marginalisation – Linda Lanzillotta further noted that youngsters were perfect targets for propaganda that provides them with an attractive, 'messianic' vision of a prosperous future, instead of one of hopelessness and inexistent opportunities.

“We must engage with the children and youth among the migrants and refugees in order to avoid that they fall into hopelessness and thus radicalisation.”

Albrecht von Boeselager

Religious actors have a unique role to play in providing a rightful spiritual path to young people through powerful ideas and narratives, as well as in connecting youngsters from different religions and places in the world through a genuine interfaith dialogue where social media could be a way to mitigate the negative impact of the ‘echo-chambers’ that Dr. Serageldin presented in the previous session.

Yahya Pallavicini underlined the necessity of updating the training of both religious and political leaders in order for them to be able to successfully address radicalisation of youngsters; such an update would include intra-faith training in order to prepare the next generations of religious scholars and preachers to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Albrecht von Boeselager noted that both political and religious leaders have a duty to carefully monitor who is actually targeting young people with radical propaganda, and to combat violence and extremism in their own ranks. As in the previous session, participants agreed that education and school play an essential role in preventing radicalisation. Hikmet Cetin further pointed out that the content of education mattered, thus that teaching the main features of all faiths was fundamental and that it was equally important to teach what secularism entailed.

“When one teaches ‘J is for Jihad; I is for Infidel; etc.’, one plants the seeds of a prospective radicalisation.”

Hikmet Cetin

The role of women as both actors of terrorism - around 10% of ISIS’s ‘soldiers’ in Western countries being female - and in the fight against radicalisation and extremism is grossly underestimated. Participants acknowledged the correlation between gender inequality and radicalisation. Consequently, all forms of discrimination must be eliminated to ensure more peaceful societies in which women are fully represented and participate in interfaith dialogues and political processes.

“Western women have a responsibility for involving migrant women in adopting a new vision of themselves and their role, and for demonstrating how essential a gender equality culture is. In a complementary way, Muslim women have the prime responsibility for vindicating the principle of gender equality in Europe and in their countries of origin.”

Linda Lanzillotta

Recent events on New Year’s Eve in Cologne, where allegedly a large number of migrant Muslim men sexually assaulted German women, created an outcry in international media, highlighting one of the major differences between Islamic and Western values, namely the social role of women. In this respect, it is important to keep promoting and defending women’s rights both in the West and the rest of the world.

With around 2/3 of the migrants reaching European shores being young, single and unaccompanied men who potentially hold biased and problematic views about women, there is a perceived risk of growing gender inequality in European countries; this must be mitigated through strong security measures safeguarding women’s freedoms. It was further held that women had a crucial part to play in promoting interfaith dialogue because of their influential role in the family, the local community, and their potentially greater capacity for listening and openness.

Ismail Serageldin added that religious communities needed to adapt to an ever-changing environment and that the essence of sound Islamic jurisprudence was to apply religious principles to the present context and circumstances, like several jurists had done over time when interpreting Quranic verses. He regretted that nowadays most religious leaders were unwilling to take a strong stance on major, contemporary issues. Albrecht von Boeselager added that more than interfaith dialogue, it was interfaith action that was also urgently needed today.

“The role of religion in conflict is often that of religiosity being misused to pursue the very secular interests of power. To fight such a tendency, perhaps the answer is not less but more religion.”

Albrecht von Boeselager

Participants concluded the session by emphasising that mass killings and wars during the 20th century had not needed any God or religious ideology to be carried out, and that faith was only engendering violence when perverted and separated from its moral content. It was underscored that radicalisation through religion today was strongly related to the ongoing political crises that traditional political parties and authorities are currently weathering, coupled with citizens' disillusion with the way government leaders are managing State affairs.

Action points relevant to gender and youth:

- » *Investing in countries which generate migration through a second Marshall Plan;*
- » *Engaging women and youngsters, both natives and migrants, in interfaith endeavours in order to prevent their radicalisation;*
- » *For religious establishments, acknowledging the evolution of modern societies and interpreting religious principles accordingly as well as closely monitoring and combatting fundamentalists who preach hatred and violence;*
- » *Coupling interfaith dialogue with interfaith action initiatives, such as the Order of Malta's Caravan Project in Lebanon through which Christians, Muslims, Jews and Druze are living, interacting with and learning about each other.*

Conclusions by NGIC Board of Trustees' co-chairs:

Vike-Freiberga reminded participants of their important role in the transformative process towards greater tolerance and understanding. This can be done by sharing their knowledge with their networks, and by communicating what had been learned during the meeting.

Ismael Serageldin offered six broad questions emerging from the discussions, providing a synthetic overview of the discussions' outcomes. In doing so, he urged fellow participants to pursue what had been started, for the right path has been set:

- » *Are conflicts and terrorism, in and from the MENA region, religious in nature or merely political? The second premise is accurate, as ISIS and its likes are political movements that use religious terminology as both an instrument of recruitment and a narrative giving legitimacy and credibility to their propaganda: it is therefore closer to totalitarianism than proselytism.*
- » *Should leading religious establishments engage in interfaith dialogue to promote peace? Absolutely, it is necessary. Besides, this process must be honest and continuous and promote peace and acceptance of the other. However, engaging in such endeavours is not sufficient, for religious establishments also need to review their stance on gender equality, secularism and democratic citizenship.*
- » *How should States be involved in this process? A balance between spiritual and temporal authorities must be found, so that their actions are mutually reinforcing: States thus need to ensure an open, pluralistic public space and protection of fundamental rights. They also need to reach out to the disaffected and the marginalised through being*

inclusive and facilitating contacts between people. Finally, they must tackle the causes of socioeconomic inequality as well as corruption, bad public management, double standards, unconstructive external interventionism and lack of positive prospects, for extremism often begins with the perception of injustice.

» *What should be done about the uninterrupted waves of migrants coming to Europe's shores? The solutions must go beyond the short-term humanitarian endeavour and address the root causes of the refugees and migrants influxes.*

» *What is the role of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in expanding the possibilities of extremism and terrorism and/or in supporting the scope of interfaith dialogue and in defining the future? New ICTs enable the sophistication of echo-chambers and vortices of lies, which lead youngsters into the clutches of extremists. Youth must therefore be reached before they fall into this trap, preferably through short, clear and effective messages. Because of the emergence of global channels of instant communication, dialogue between faiths, peoples and civilisations thus needs to become an open, ongoing, natural practice in everyday life.*

» *What is the role of women and youth in this picture? Leaders need to accept the reality of a 21st century where societies are mainly filled with people under the age of 35 who are the first targets of terrorists. They thus must adapt to youth's way of living, thinking and yearning, and push for a proper, inclusive education of youngsters on both secularism and religion. As women are also increasingly valuable targets for extremists, leaders need to work towards better gender equality; however, they also need to re-evaluate the role of women in both terrorism and counterterrorism. interventionism and lack of positive prospects, for extremism often begins with the perception of injustice.*

Annexes: Speeches of the chairpersons and the President of the Italian Republic of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center delivered on the occasion of the Presidential reception at the Quirinale Palace

Speech from Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga:

Mr. President of the Republic,

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Nizami Ganjavi International Centre, may I first of all thank you for the honour of being received at the Quirinale Palace in connection with the High Level Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue for Peace, which is being held here in the Eternal City. We are most grateful for the high level of the hospitality that we are enjoying here in Italy and delighted to be collaborating with the Italian Society for International Organization.

The 12th Century Sage for whom our Centre is named was a great poet and a devoted Muslim, whose wisdom, humanity and tolerance remain as exemplary today as they were centuries ago. Our International Board of Trustees, which I have the honour of co-chairing with Dr. Ismail Serageldin, has been promoting the values that this great man stood for through a number of impressively successful conferences in Baku, Azerbaijan, as well as elsewhere in the world. In our work we have been constantly emphasizing the importance of dialogue as a means for both preventing and resolving conflicts. The topic of interfaith dialogue is entirely consistent with the priorities that our Centre has been following and we look very much forward to fruitful debates between enlightened representatives of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths here in Rome.

As we look on with distress at the appeal of violent extremism in Europe and its neighbours, we can see that it takes root in a tangled mix of causal factors, of which sectarian conflict and religious fanaticism is only one. Poverty may be a contributing, but never a causal factor, tribal allegiances definitely play their part, but enjoying the thrills of hatred and the licence to kill others is probably the biggest attraction. In many ways, what is now happening in the MENA region brings back memories of the Crusades, which pitted not only Christians against Muslims in the Holy Land, but also Christian armies against heretics such as the Albigenses or the so-called pagans like my ancestors in North-East Europe. While spreading Christianity by sword and fire

on other continents, the merciless Wars of Religion between Protestants and Catholics in Europe were a close analogue to the strife between Shia and Sunni Muslims that we are seeing today. Each side was so firmly convinced that its particular version of the truth was the only one acceptable, that it had to be forced on others by any means possible, including eliminating them.

Zealotry thus blends into fanaticism, which can be just as pitiless and extreme in the service of a political ideology as in the service of religious sectarianism. Extremism of views and intolerance towards others is common to both, so that political radicals and religious fanatics both become equal enemies of pluralism and of democratic civil liberties.

Extreme views feed on indoctrination and propaganda, so that by the time someone has become radicalized, it is very difficult to have any kind of dialogue with them, let alone a rational one. The right time for dialogue is therefore before a person becomes hypnotized by their sense of messianic purpose, their cultivated hatred of targeted enemies and their general paranoia. Religious leaders as well as political ones have a crucial role to play in fostering acceptance of differences and tolerance toward differing views. They need to engage in dialogue with each other and reach out to their respective constituents or faithful by emphasizing the many principles and values that both civic and temporal ideals have in common.

Church and State, or Religion and State, if you prefer, are separate from each other in democratic societies, so that matters of faith are left to the free choice and conscience of every individual and should not become a source of open conflict. Indeed, in free and open societies lay and religious parts of society can easily live together and play mutually supportive and complementary roles in creating peaceful and prosperous communities. Before peace can reign, however, those wishing to benefit from it do have to make efforts to defend it and to promote it. That is something that will always take conviction, commitment, engagement and perseverance. What it should never do, is to make us a mirror image of those, whose extremism and fanaticism makes them deny the humanity of all who in any way do not fit with their narrow vision of what is right and proper.

We look forward to a fruitful exchange of ideas on the pressing problems facing Europe and its neighbours today and express our sincere thanks to Italy and its highest officials for their openness and hospitality.

Speech from Dr. Ismail Serageldin:

Mr. President,

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me personally and as co-Chair of the BoT of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center (NGIC) to stand before you here on this important occasion. The world is in the throes of a profound transformation. Our Mediterranean sea – the Mare Nostrum of the ancient Romans – is the scene of the worst barbarism of wars in failed states, and of the spillover effects of this massive murder and mayhem as millions of people flee their devastated homelands to seek asylum in Europe.

The sea has not always been kind to these refugees...wanting no more than a chance for a decent life, they too frequently lost their own life, the ultimate price that any human can pay, despite their innocence of the chaotic wars that are destroying their homelands. Their arrival on European shores poses new and different challenges for them as well as for the receiving European nations. Humanitarian and security considerations are frequently pulling in different directions. The desire to maintain the open borders of the Schengen agreement confront justified fears that unchecked aliens – with a few terrorists in their midst – could be coming into our nation unimpeded. The numbers of people who pose a risk to society may be very small in that tide of fleeing refugees, but it does not take many persons to launch terrorist attacks that have devastating impact on society.

Understandably, that puts enormous strain on the receiving countries in Europe, and the fear mongers and peddlers of hate are becoming important over the political landscape of Europe. But equally, the failed states of the Middle East are seeing their societies torn apart largely along sectarian lines.

Yet religion, whether Islam, Christianity or Judaism, teaches openness to the other, assistance to the needy and the embrace of our common humanity. Religious leaders of all three religions and their many subdivisions must play a role in reinforcing that call by the better angels of our nature, that reawakening of our conscience, and by reminding us of past lessons of our history, so that societies can interact better in these times of crisis. Religious leaders must interact to stop the polarization that is increasing in all our societies. The calls for inter-faith dialogues are multiplying. But is that productive? Is that enough?

Beyond the religious leaders stand the governments and their responsibilities vis-à-vis their citizens as well as their humanitarian obligations. How do we strike a balance between the role of religion and the role of the secular state so that their actions are mutually reinforcing? Our societies, especially in Europe, must keep humane measures in place in dealing with the hapless refugees. But they must also reinforce security without jeopardizing the fundamental freedoms that democracy guarantees all citizens. These are complex challenges, and many lives depend on our ability to find effective solutions. In our coming deliberation we shall devote ourselves to the search for that elusive balance.

Thus I thank you once again for hosting this important and most timely event, and we hope that the discussions in these meetings will help shed some light on these vital questions.

Thank you.



Excerpt of the Speech of the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella

Dear guests,

I am delighted to see you at the conference and honored to speak to you. This conference gathered a large number of respected presidents, people with extensive political experience, as well as former presidents and prime ministers who did so much for global cooperation. We see a huge black spot, a big problem which is crucial not only for Europe, but for all mankind. All the events taking place today in Africa, the Middle East, violence, murder are caused by the lack of intercultural dialogue. For the time being this creates a vast form of migration. All these people running away from violence, murder, leaving their land and home just to survive. They expected to be met with respect.

All terror which now grips the Middle East tells us we should be much better in cooperation. We should pay more attention to these problems, not only to the region dominated by terrorism but the whole world. We should be more attentive to the security of our countries and to develop more the cooperation between the states.

All states first of all should ensure the security of their citizens. The Nizami Ganjavi International Center and the Italian Society of International Organizations did a big job creating this conference, as a President I will support you and try to do everything to develop your endeavors further. This kind of conference gives us a chance to solve all kinds of problems in the world, and I am sure whenever world will face any crises on inter religious and inter cultural understanding the Nizami Ganjavi International Center and the SIOI can take actions towards solving the world crises. I wish your forum every success and would like to finish my speech with a quote by the great poet Nizami Ganjavi: "If you are a person, blend in with society, you will feel yourself a human only among other people".

List of Participants

Sergio Mattarella President of the Italian Republic, 2015-...

Rosen Plevneliev President of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2012-...

Gjorge Ivanov President of the Republic of Macedonia, 2009-...

Giorgio Napolitano President of the Italian Republic, 2006-2015

Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga President of Latvia, 1999-2007, Co-Chair of NGIC

Valdis Zatlers President of Latvia, 2007-2011

Viktor Yushchenko President of Ukraine, 2005-2010

Bronisław Komorowski President of Poland, 2010-2015

Petar Stoyanov President of Bulgaria, 1997-2002

Emil Constantinescu President of Romania, 1996-2000

Ivo Josipovic President of Croatia, 2010-2015

Stjepan Mesić President of Croatia, 2000-2010

Rexhep Meidani President of Albania, 1997-2002

Petru Lucinschi President of Moldova, 1997-2001

Iveta Radicova Prime Minister of Slovakia, 2010-2012

Zlatko Lagumdžija Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2001-2002

Pietro Grasso President of the Italian Senate, 2013-...

Linda Lanzillotta Vice President of the Italian Senate, 2013-...

Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager Grand Chancellor, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sovereign Order of Malta, 2014-...

Franco Frattini Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2002-2004 / 2008-2011; President of the SIOI

Hikmet Cetin Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1991-1994

Michele Valensise Secretary General of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2012-...

Paul Tighe Adjunct Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, 2015-...

Paul Bhatti Federal Minister of National Harmony and Minorities Affairs, 2011-2013

Nazim Ibrahimov Chairman of State Committee of Azerbaijan Republic on Work with Diaspora, 2008-...

Ismail Serageldin Founding Director of Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2002-...; Co-Chair of NGIC

Abdulaziz Al-Twajjri Director General of SESCO, 1991-...

Amre Moussa Secretary General of the Arab League, 2001-2011

Farida Allaghi Permanent Representative of Libya to the European Union, 2015-...

Yahya Pallavicini Vice President, CO.RE.IS. (Islamic Religious Community of Italy)

Third Global Baku Forum:

Building Trust in the Emerging/New World Order Meeting Report

This meeting report was written by mediatEUr.

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