

# ISLAM IN EUROPE – A NEW GLOBAL CHALLENGE

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## Abstract:

*In the context of the new world order, one of the major challenges to global economy lies in finding the most effective way of including Islam in 21<sup>st</sup>-century architecture. Globalization means increasing interdependences among national economies, whereas borders are becoming less and less visible. Will Islamic countries manage to integrate into this whole? Or on the contrary? Fighting against “uniformity” raises barriers increasingly difficult to surpass to everything the West refers to.*

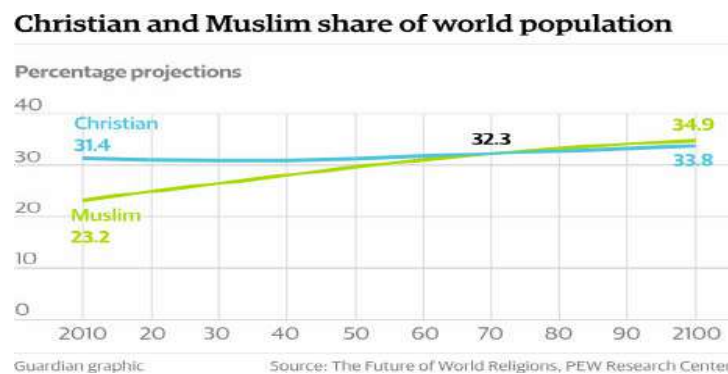
*Recent developments in Europe unfortunately demonstrate the proliferation of terrorism amid the major European immigration of Muslim population due to deepened domestic conflicts in some Islamic states. The growth of Muslim population in some EU countries has led to imposing certain restrictions on immigration, but nevertheless a steady growth of Muslim communities in Europe is estimated in the near future.*

**Keywords:** globalization, Islam, immigration, integration, Muslim, terrorism.

**JEL Classification:** F5

## 1. Development of Muslim Population

Islam has come into being in the Middle East and the Islamic world has enjoyed a special geographical position. However, the countries in the region have a very low level of economic development. The Muslim area comprises 46 countries, with three major global Muslim concentrations, namely North Africa, Middle East and South Asia. The Arab world is the centre of Islam: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia (North Africa); Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Iraq, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Syria, Yemen (the Arabian Peninsula). Muslims are followers of the religion of Islam. “Muslim” is an Arabic word and it means “one who submits (to God)”. The religion of Islam is one of today’s dominant religions, with followers across the globe.



**Fig. no. 1**

Source: Muslim population in Europe to reach 10% by 2050, new forecast shows,  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/02/muslim-population-growth-christians-religion-pew>  
[accessed on 23 October 2016]

Muslims are the second largest religious group in the world after Christians. According to a survey of the *Pew Research Centre*, by 2070 the Muslim population will have exceeded the number of Christians, and by 2100, the share of Muslims in the total global population will have been nearly 35% (Figure no. 1)

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Islamic countries have reported a population boom in recent decades due to rising birth rates and reducing mortality rates thanks to fighting epidemics and famine.

Recent data show that the population of the Middle East is an increasingly smaller percentage of the Muslim community in the world. In contrast, in countries such as India and China, the concentration of Muslim population is growing. Indonesia and Pakistan are the states with the highest percentage of Muslim population in the total population, with more than 90%.

And although it is believed that the Muslim population has grown in Europe due to immigration, statistics show that in Russia, Albania, Kosovo, the Muslims are indigenous population. In fact, over half of Europe's Muslims were born here.

Regarding the European Union Member States, Germany and France are the countries with the largest Muslim population.

In recent decades, the share of Muslims in Europe has increased by about 1% in ten years, from 4% in 1990 to 6% in 2010, being estimated that by 2030 their share will have been 8% of Europe's population.

Moreover, according to a survey of the *Pew Research Centre*, the average age of Muslims in Europe is 32 years old, eight years less than the average age of the Europeans (40 years old). In contrast, the average age of Christians in Europe is 42 years old.

In the USA, it is estimated that the number of Muslims will increase to 6.2 million in the next years.

By 2030, the world's Muslim population could sum up a quarter of the total number of inhabitants in the world (26.4%), an increase of approximately 35% more than the current level.

The growth of the Muslim population is accompanied by a series of problems, namely:

- ✓ the share of the Muslim population under 15 years old is high and young people have always been at the centre of protests, thus being recruited by fundamentalist organizations;
- ✓ along with increasing population, there is also the growing and diversifying of needs that must be satisfied; needs are unlimited and resources are unfortunately limited. These limits will lead to new conflicts among Islamic states, most of them with low levels of economic development, and thus with reduced abilities to meet the growing needs of populations;
- ✓ the Islamic world is recognized to equip some of its member states with an essential resource for development which is oil and which can cause new confrontations to the Muslim population. Many of the countries concerned have made headlines in the world just based on their endowment with natural resources, generating global crises. Although some Islamic states report extremely high per capita income, it is still here that some populations live below the poverty line;
  - ✓ reducing illiteracy will create a gap between younger educated generations and elderly generations that are largely illiterate.

The growth of the Muslim population has a special influence on the entire world economy given its increasing share. The new world order will have to take account of these states that are important players on the world map economically and demographically.

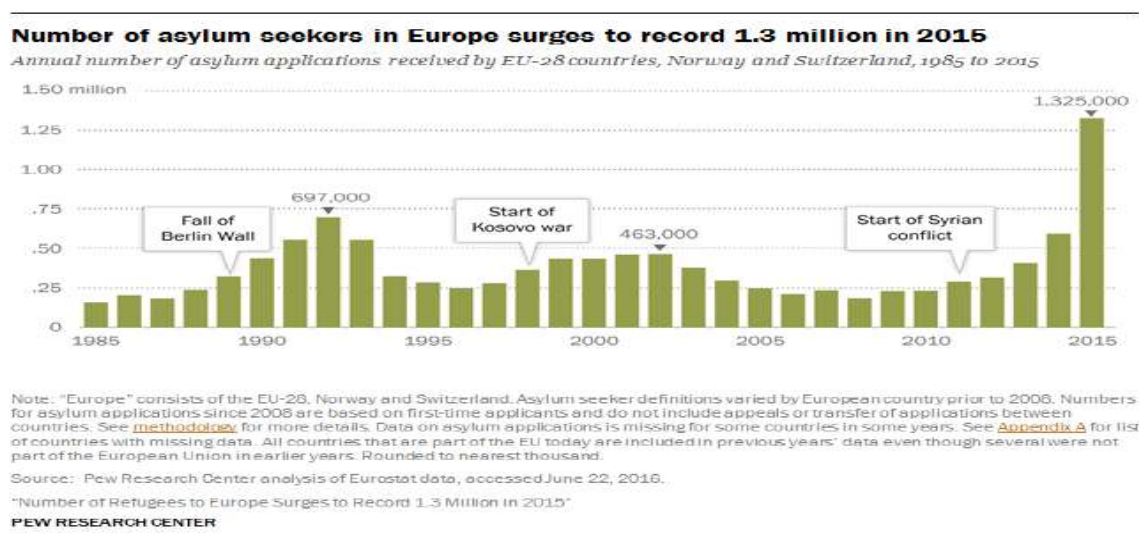
## **2. Future of Islamism in Europe**

The protracted war in most Islamic countries generates besides huge costs, casualties and displacement of the local population to safer regions. The population most affected is usually made up of marginalized members of society. Refugees have an uncertain status,

both in terms of their host country and their country of origin where they do not know if they will ever return.

Facts in Europe demonstrate that a significant proportion of the Muslim population in the countries affected by conflicts choose to take refuge in the old continent in the hope of stable and secure lives. Moreover, many aspects of the refugee issue have their causes in religious, ideological and cultural matters, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century every citizen of this planet has the right to liberty and security.

Invaded by waves of refugees, what is the future of integrated Europe and what will be the impact of Islamic culture on the old continent? While reducing the birth rate in Europe, weakening Christianity, but increasing Muslim immigration while increasing their demography, Europe is urged to adjust.



**Fig. no. 2**

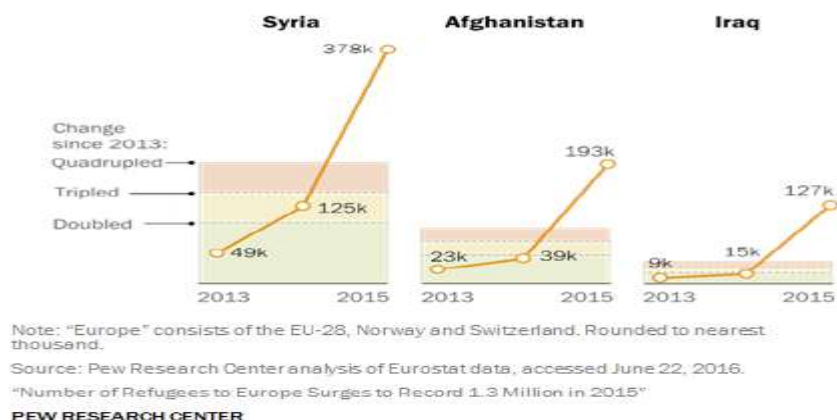
Source: [http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/pgm\\_2016-08-02\\_europe-asylum-01/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/pgm_2016-08-02_europe-asylum-01/)  
[accessed on 23 October 2016]

According to the *Pew Research Centre*, the number of asylum seekers in Europe in 2015 exceeded 1.3 million citizens (Figure no. 2). In Kosovo and Bosnia, the Muslims fought bloody wars to remove the dominance of Orthodox Serbs, resulting in advanced European countries in the early 2000's in a wave of almost 500,000 refugees. Unfortunately, at present, the conflict in Syria has caused an unprecedented wave of refugees in Europe. Most of them have reached Europe across the Mediterranean, while a smaller share of refugees have taken the land route via Turkey. What is happening to Europe is a political and social phenomenon triggered by the conflicts faced by some Islamic states, by the level of poverty and by human rights violations in these countries.

According to estimates, if the Muslim population in Europe was 46 million people in 2010, by 2050 its number will have been 71 million people.

### Number of asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq more than quadrupled between 2013 and 2015

Number of first-time asylum applications to Europe from each country of origin, in thousands



**Fig. no. 3**

Source: [http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/pgm\\_2016-08-02\\_europe-asylum-04/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/pgm_2016-08-02_europe-asylum-04/)  
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According to the *Pew Research Centre*, the number of asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq quadrupled between 2013 and 2015 in Europe (Figure no. 4). The Afghans, Syrians and Iraqis are among the most affected by the scourge of exile, with countries of origin being forced to make real efforts to punish human rights violations.

According to the same research centre, it is estimated that by 2030 the share of Muslim population in the total population of some European countries will have increased very much as follows: Albania - 83.2% (82.1% in 2010); Bosnia-Herzegovina - 42.7% (41.6.4% in 2010); Macedonia - 40.3% (34.9% in 2010); Cyprus - 22.7% (22.7% in 2010); Montenegro - 21.5% (18.5% in 2010); Bulgaria - 15.7% (13.4% in 2010); France - 10.3% (7.5% in 2010); Belgium - 10.2% (6.0% in 2010); Sweden - 9.9% (4.9% in 2010); Austria - 9.3% (5.7% in 2010); the UK - 8.2% (4.6% in 2010); Switzerland - 8.1% (5.1% in 2010); Netherlands - 7.8% (5.5% in 2010); Germany - 7.1% (5.0% in 2010) etc.

What will Europe do in this context of higher birth rates among Muslims accentuated by increased immigration?

Do the exodus and increasing the Muslim population birth rate mean emphasizing fundamentalism, too?

Islamic fundamentalism has its origins in the 20's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and from spatial perspective it is the product of conservative environments from the USA, not the Middle East. Fundamentalism is based on the system of religious values as a source of political legitimacy, reducing citizens to the status of mere believers. Imposing fundamentalist views by violence shows that those who resort to such practices (terrorism) are prisoners of an archaic world where sanctions are supreme.

Europe has been hit by countless terrorist attacks along time, but amid Muslim immigration they seem to have sharpened.

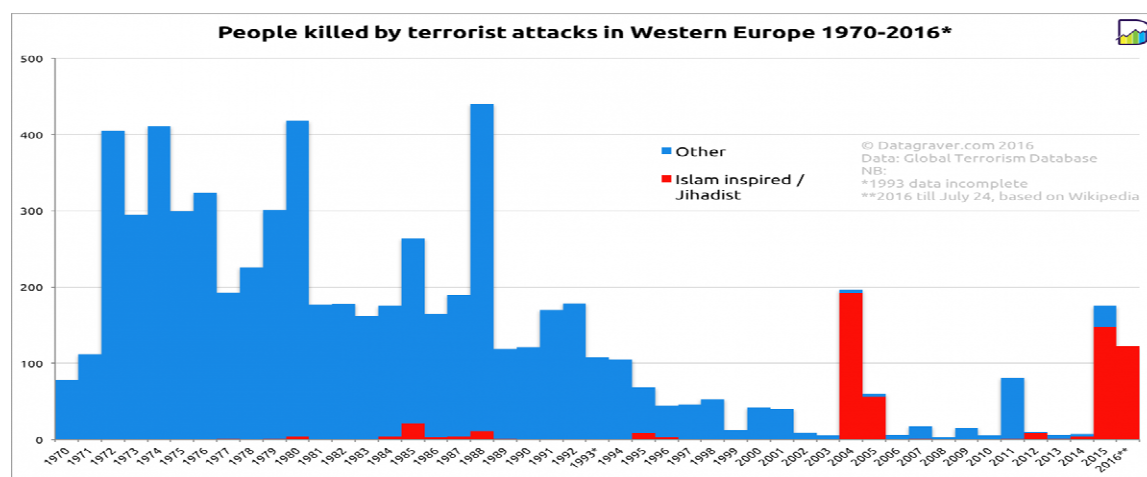


Fig. no. 4

Source: <http://www.datagraver.com/case/people-killed-by-terrorism-per-year-in-western-europe-1970-2015>  
[accessed on 23 October 2016]

Analyzing Figure no. 4, a major increase of terrorist attacks can be seen from Islamic groups in 2015 and 2016 in Western Europe, exactly the period when Europe was facing an unprecedented wave of Muslim immigrants. In these circumstances, European countries should join efforts to fight terrorism both, especially for finding real and lasting solutions to “adopt” the new Muslim citizens.

The Brussels attack in March 2016, the “capital” of the European Union shows that they had sought to strike exactly in the heart of Europe.

One explanation according to a study conducted by CNN journalists is that Belgium has the most fighters of the Islamic State per capita in Europe. According to them, Brussels is not only the capital of the European Union, but also a focus of the Islamic State and a logistics base for extremist operations.

Moreover, the attacks in France, in Paris, November 2015 and in Nice, July 2016 demonstrates that they strike at some of the main players of the European Union.

Terrorism is a threat to national security, to the values of democratic society and to the rights and freedoms of European citizens. Therefore, European countries have decided to fight together against terrorism and ensure their citizens the highest possible level of protection. In this respect, the European Union Council adopted the *EU Strategy for Combating Terrorism* in 2005, and in June 2014 they adopted a revised version of the Strategy.

In March 2016, the European Union Council agreed on the Directive on Combating Terrorism.

The proposed Directive strengthens the legal framework of the EU in terms of preventing terrorist attacks, namely:

- ✓ Terrorist displacements to counter the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters;
- ✓ Financing, organizing and facilitating such displacement, including through logistical and material support, providing firearms and explosives, shelter, transportation, services, assets and property;
- ✓ Receiving training for terrorism, including providing an opportunity to investigate and prosecute training activities that have the potential to lead to terrorist offenses;
- ✓ Providing funds to be used to commit terrorist offenses and crimes relating to terrorist groups or activities.

This Directive will complement the current legislation on victims’ rights in order to ensure that victims of terrorism receive immediate access to specialized support services that provide physical and psychosocial treatments, as well as to information regarding their rights.

To European states and especially to EU Member States, immigration, increased birth rate of Muslim population in Europe, as well as terrorism are a new challenge. Everything that is happening in Europe at present comes amid extremely serious domestic problems that the European Union is facing, this integrationist group trying to demonstrate the whole world that it is an example of integration.

The European Union's motto "*Unity in Diversity*" shows that the Europeans have united to promote peace and prosperity while accepting to open up their spirit to the so diverse cultures, traditions and languages of our continent. Will European states be able to comply with this slogan in the context of Islamization and growing influence of the Muslim population in Europe?

The future will show whether the Europeans will live together in harmony and peace while observing fundamental human rights, with those who are "invading" their territory today.

### **3. Conclusions**

In advanced countries until the late '70s, the importance of Islam was diminished in achieving the foreign policy of Muslim countries, even though there were times when the Muslim religion played an undisputed role in the anti-colonial movements and regional conflicts.

Time has shown that Islam's influence has been underestimated on the broad masses of the population in Muslim countries, on the Islamic religion's potential for mobilization and integration of social force. In the early 80's, attitude to Islam was already radically changed. It has become certain that the Islamic religion is going through a stormy period of revival, that it has already been transformed into an independent political force in all countries.

It can be said that Islamism is a political rather than a religious trend because its representatives do not submit ideas to reform religion as a system of dogmas and rituals. They advocate the essential transformation of the socio-political system and of business relations in society, that is changing the social order not only in Muslim countries but throughout the world. Islamists accept the conquests of science, but only as long as they do not contradict religious texts.

Increasing the geostrategic importance of the Muslim world is a reaction to changes in the world economy in recent years.

In a global world where boundaries disappear, one should not forget the states which, although not very advanced economically, have a huge potential, namely: population, geostrategic position, natural resources, by which they can considerably influence the development of the entire world economy.

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