

Our Shared Europe

Swapping treasures
Sharing losses
Celebrating futures

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A report for the British
Council's proposed project:

Our Shared Europe

Ehsan Masood

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Foreword

The way in which culture shapes the identity of the societies and communities in which we now live is one of the defining issues of our time. Culture is about who we are, how we see the world, and how we relate to those around us. It is about our values and about the daily perspectives that we use to engage with our neighbours and friends, our colleagues at work and those whom we pass in the street. Culture is the framework within which we seek to position ourselves and our place in the world.

We are experiencing a period of huge change in our societies – both at national and local level. Globalisation, migration, climate change, the energy and food crises, and the constantly shifting nature of international events are propelling us into a more uncertain and less stable future. It is at times like this that culture and cultural relations have such an important part to play in building trust and creating better understanding between nations – especially within societies and communities. Equally, culture can also be misused so that it becomes a vehicle for fuelling fears and tensions that can corrode trust between peoples and communities. In fact, culture and cultural identities are used to exclude as well as to include.

The Our Shared Europe project is the British Council's response to one of the major cultural challenges facing our continent today – the growing mutual mistrust between Muslim communities and wider European society. Our Shared Europe seeks to find common ground, and build shared values, perspectives and behaviours that are based on mutual respect and trust. In particular, it is about how to acknowledge the contribution of Islamic communities and cultures – both in the past but also in the present – to the shaping of contemporary European civilisation and society. This means recognising the rich and diverse roots of our culture and society and using this recognition to build a more inclusive view of the continent that we all share together. Otherwise, there is a risk that a growing sense of alienation will emerge between various communities across Europe. This alienation could then affect all parts of society leading at best to indifference and prejudice and at worst to violence and persecution.

The Europe of today is what it is thanks to a complex set of cultural influences. These include the ones commonly known: Christian, Jewish and secularist. And it includes those often known only to specialists, such as the cultures of India and China as well as the Islamic peoples of the world. It is from this conglomerate of cultures and influences that Europe derives its beauty, its strength and its multiple identities. The Muslim contribution to this stretches back over 1,300 years. This is worth acknowledging and understanding. It has not always been an easy story and it has often been a misunderstood one. There has been joy as well as tragedy in this relationship. Any initiative that seeks to build a better understanding of our common past, and our shared present, must take into account the diverse tensions that have existed – and still exist – around the presence in Europe of significant Muslim communities.

Swapping treasures, sharing losses and celebrating futures.

This is an apt metaphor for what we need to do if we are to succeed in building a new narrative about how we can all best live together in the Europe of the 21st century. The Our Shared Europe project is still in its early stages. We are only at the beginning of a journey that the British Council cannot – and would not wish to – make on its own. There are many institutions, such as philanthropic foundations, think tanks, universities, businesses and other civil society organisations in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and in other parts of the world, that have a lot to offer. We would like to invite them to join us in developing what we feel is a very important and much-needed initiative. We want these organisations to take joint ownership with us and help shape the project and its final outcomes.

To test our thinking about the validity of the Our Shared Europe concept we commissioned the science writer Ehsan Masood to carry out a detailed consultation exercise on the initial ideas that we had developed. We launched this process at an international meeting in London in October 2007. This was followed by detailed consultation meetings with over 150 people in countries across Europe and North Africa. The results of this consultation exercise are presented in Ehsan's report. Overall the response to the concept that we proposed has been positive. There is still a lot more work to be done in defining the actual detail of the project but Ehsan's consultations already tested various possible scenarios and approaches. Most of these have been strongly endorsed and are listed in the following report.

I should like to use this opportunity to express a warm word of thanks to the many individuals and organisations around Europe and beyond who engaged with us during the consultation process and provided us with such valuable feedback.

The next stage in the development of Our Shared Europe will be to have detailed discussions with organisations and institutions that express an interest in working with us. This will be followed by a partners' conference in late 2008, when we will formally announce the launch of the project and begin detailed work on defining its main components. Our plan is that Our Shared Europe should begin its first activities in 2009.

Please do take time to read this report and please let us have your views. You will find the contact details of Guido Jansen, Project Manager for Our Shared Europe, at the front of this publication.

We look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephan Roman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Stephan Roman
Regional Director West Europe and North America
British Council

August 2008

Executive summary

For over 1,300 years, the continent that is now called Europe has been home to peoples with direct or indirect connections to Islam. They have been traders and teachers, converts and conquerors, astronomers and astrologers, architects and builders, gardeners, chefs, clerks, spies, philosophers, medics, mystics, missionaries and more.

The European Union and its European neighbourhood, which includes Turkey and Russia, has more than 120 million Muslims* – a set of individuals, communities and countries that are just as diverse as those in history; perhaps more so. There are some 20 million in the EU, including indigenous Muslims, newcomers, and the descendants of former migrants from the countries of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

* The word 'Muslims' in the context of this report is taken to mean those who profess the Islamic faith, as well as those from Muslim cultural backgrounds.

A combination of factors has led to a steadily increasing number of new migrants to the EU. The demand is being driven by the needs of business and industry, sport, the arts, knowledge, science and technology. Other factors include family reunions and the urgency to accommodate those fleeing violence and conflict.

Yet at the same time, EU governments face a difficulty. As populations become more mixed, some voters are becoming more sceptical, with an increasing minority becoming more concerned and even hostile to the changing nature of societies. Among other things, this is being fuelled by the consequences of the rise of Al-Qaeda, the 9/11 attacks on the United States and acts of terrorism on the streets of European cities.

Alongside scepticism of immigration comes another trend: a small, but vocal group of people in Europe admitting in public that they dislike Muslims; and a small but vocal group of Muslims in Europe admitting to the fact that they feel the same way about their non-Muslim neighbours.

The view of Islam as 'other' has also meant that European countries with large Muslim populations, such as Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Herzegovina and Albania, are cast as outsiders, banging on the door of a Europe allegedly founded upon an exclusively Judeo-Christian heritage.

One of the better polls tracking public perceptions is the Pew Global Attitudes Project, which has been collecting data from 13 countries since 2001. Its latest findings (2006) are complex and not easy to summarise. But to quote from the survey: 'Muslims and Westerners agree that relations between them are generally bad, but disagree about who to blame.'

Such tensions in Europe are hardly new. Relations on the whole have had their share of hiccups and the historical record is full of accounts of wars and mistrust. But the history of the encounter between the two is more complex.

There is another, and much less acknowledged side to Islam's 1,300-year presence in Europe. Most (if not all) of the world's great empires have patronised knowledge and learning. Wealthy dominions can afford to do so and the Islamic empires were no different. Centres of innovation and learning were dotted around the 'Muslim world' during the Middle Ages.

They could be found in Bokhara in Central Asia, Baghdad and Damascus in the Middle East, but also in Córdoba, Granada, Istanbul and Toledo in Europe.

Our Shared Europe: aims and objectives

If Our Shared Europe has one overriding aim, it is to strengthen the bonds of trust between Muslims and other majority and minority communities in Europe, and to do this by creating more understanding and awareness of the many contributions that Muslims have made in history and in present-day Europe.

It is born out of a sense of urgency that something needs to be done, soon, in partnership with like-minded groups, and on a significant scale in order to have meaningful impact.

The more specific objectives are to:

- create a shared understanding among all Europeans of Islam’s past and present contribution to European societies and identities
- generate awareness that Judaeo-Christian and Islamic intellectual and cultural roots have together created Europe’s unique character and that this profile is one of its biggest strengths today
- encourage all Europeans to take ownership of this aspect of our common identity and to help reshape it for the 21st century.

Taking the temperature

The British Council has more than 70 years of experience in creating mutually beneficial relationships between Britain and the peoples of other countries. In recent years, the organisation has been thinking and consulting about how this experience can be harnessed to begin to address one of the biggest cultural relations challenges of all time. Our Shared Europe comes from a desire to place the British Council's resources in the service of such an ambition, and to invite partners and like-minded groups to join in.

After an initial consultation meeting in London with a group of UK-based experts in October 2007, an initial concept paper (Annexe 1) was tested in interviews and round-table meetings with over 150 professionals from 17 cities in ten countries. These countries were (in alphabetical order): Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, France, Germany, Morocco, the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, and the UK. Interviewees also came from Portugal.

The experts that we met were drawn from: higher education and research (including teachers and those who work with young people); Muslim community non-governmental organisations and faith groups (including religious leaders); city and metropolitan authorities; the creative industries (artists, film-makers and playwrights); media; and public relations.

Among those interviewed, there was close to unanimity on several things:

- the project is ambitious
- the fall in trust between communities needs urgent attention
- the British Council is bold, brave and prescient in its desire to want to make a difference
- the British Council cannot undertake an initiative such as Our Shared Europe on its own.

A clear majority agreed that there is a real need for public recognition of the contribution of Muslim cultures to the making of Europe. The project research team discovered a number of exciting and forward-looking initiatives in many European cities that have been designed to recognise these contributions, and they discovered many initiatives intended to strengthen trust between communities.

Some concerns were also raised. A number of respondents said that a project that is designed to reduce mistrust needs to acknowledge all aspects of any shared history. If this history involves pain as well as pleasure, then the initiative needs to find ways of talking about the tragedies as much as the triumphs. Another consistent voice (especially among elites) in different cities was that Europe's uniqueness lay in *laïcité*.^{*} Concern was also raised as to whether the project represented the softer side to European counter-terrorism efforts, for which there is currently much public funding.

* *Laïcité* in this report refers to laws or regulations that forbid public displays of religious observance. The word comes from France, though laicism is also found in countries with large Muslim populations, notably Turkey. Supporters of the concept believe it is among the foundations of the modern secular state. Opponents counter that laicism amounts to a denial of religious freedom.

Recommendations for further discussion

The following practical recommendations on the nature of Our Shared Europe are based on ideas from the initial concept paper as well as suggestions made during different stages of the subsequent consultations.

Our Shared Europe should:

- influence public debate and encourage thought about the contribution that Muslims have made – and are continuing to make – to European societies and identities; organise conferences, debates and seminars aimed at decision-makers, innovators and young leaders
- offer training events to media professionals on the past, present and future Muslim contribution to European society and identity

- popularise Muslim contributions to Europe using radio, television, the internet, advertising and cinema; working with broadcasters, media businesses, schools, libraries and youth groups
- create an Our Shared Europe awards scheme
- create an online platform combining knowledge of Muslim contributions to Europe
- educate the next generation so that they are better informed about the Muslim contribution to Europe
- help build new transcultural leadership skills among young people from both established and disadvantaged communities
- organise an international commission on the history of Muslims and Europe
- commission research on the impact of the news media on community relations
- increase volunteer and educational exchanges between young people from different countries
- aspire to lead political thinking.

In conclusion

Knowledge, creativity and innovation emerge when people from diverse cultures, speaking different languages, share spaces with majority communities in an atmosphere of trust, friendship and security. Our Shared Europe is an invitation to like-minded partners to join the journey to this goal.

Introduction and project rationale

For over 1,300 years, the continent that is now called Europe has been home to peoples with direct or indirect connections to Islam. They have been traders and teachers, converts and conquerors, astronomers and astrologers, architects and builders, gardeners, chefs, clerks, spies, philosophers, medics, mystics, missionaries and more.

The European Union contains some 20 million Muslims – including newcomers, indigenous Muslims, and the descendants of former migrants from the countries of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Their numbers – owing to a combination of factors – are steadily increasing. ‘Pull’ factors include vacant jobs in both the highly skilled as well as unskilled sectors, especially in service industries. ‘Push’ factors include family reunions, the birth of children and those fleeing from conflict zones.

The EU and its European neighbourhood, which includes Turkey and Russia, has more than 120 million Muslims, a set of individuals, communities and countries that are just as diverse as those in history; perhaps more so.

The demand is being fuelled by business and industry, as well as the world of sport, the arts, knowledge, science and technology – just as it has always been. In the English-speaking world, supporters of immigration include the *Financial Times* and *The Economist*.¹

The idea that innovation and creativity often come from people regarded as ‘outsiders’ is well-established in the research literature. In a pamphlet recently published by the UK’s National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, the writer Charles Leadbeater argues that immigration is critical for the development of innovation in societies, in part because people from other cultures bring new and different perspectives to problem-solving. Closed and homogenous societies, warns Leadbeater ‘can become myopic and prejudiced and so fail to spot vital ideas that come from unusual sources.’²

Europe’s governments, of all stripes, also buy into the idea that difference and diversity are good for economies. Europe is an open space, they say, and will become more so, along the lines of the USA. Under the EU’s Lisbon Strategy governments have pledged to spend three per cent of gross domestic product on research and development. This target will not be met with the EU’s existing bank of researchers and the EU has acknowledged that member states will need to find ways of attracting researchers from third countries.³

At the same time, the EU is planning its own version of the American Green Card – the Blue Card – a scheme to attract 20 million professionals from Africa, Asia and Latin America. At the time of writing, talent scouts from European cities are on a world tour of developing countries with the aim of recruiting the most highly skilled to come and live and work in the continent.

Yet at the same time, EU governments face a difficulty. As populations become more mixed, voters are becoming more sceptical, with an increasing minority becoming more concerned, and even hostile, to the changing nature of their societies.

This is being fuelled to a significant extent by the rise of Al-Qaeda, the 9/11 attacks on the United States and acts of terrorism by Muslims on the streets of European cities.

The 2006 Eurobarometer survey of attitudes towards immigration illustrates this difficulty.⁴ Of 27,000 people polled in the 27 EU countries, four in ten believe that ethnic groups are a cause of insecurity, and almost half believe that newcomers contributed to an increase in unemployment. A poll conducted for the BBC in November 2007, found two-thirds of respondents believing that immigration has worsened the character of where they live, and 80 per cent believing that immigrants have put added pressure on schools, hospitals and public housing.⁵

Alongside scepticism of immigration, comes another trend: significant numbers of people in Europe admitting in public that they have an aversion to Muslims. A parallel trend is the number of Muslims in Europe admitting in public that they feel the same way about non-Muslims. One of the better polls tracking this issue is the Pew Global Attitudes Project, which has been collecting data from 13 countries since 2001. Its latest findings (2006) are complex and not easy to summarise. But to quote from the survey: 'Muslims and Westerners agree that relations between them are generally bad, but disagree about who to blame.'⁶

These are unwelcome trends and have the potential to worsen a situation that is already tense in some places. Europe's national governments (along with the European Commission) know they must keep the continent open to the world in order to remain competitive. At the same time, polls keep telling them that immigration and Muslims are high on voters' lists of concerns. And if that were not enough, there is a constant current of European Muslim opinion (around ten to 12 per cent) that persists in telling pollsters that it is sympathetic to Al-Qaeda.

The broad-scale response from governments has contradictory dimensions to it. Skilled migrants are to be welcomed: 20 million in the next two decades. But the new arrivals can expect biometric visa and border checks, and increased land and sea patrols to deter illegal entry. Once in their new countries, the public discussion will include words such as 'manage', 'control', 'deradicalisation', 'values', 'counter-terrorism', and 'community cohesion'.

The rise of the extreme right

Mistrust is coinciding with another significant development: Europe's electorate has been voting in increasing numbers for political parties of the extreme right.⁷ Additional votes are also being cast in favour of nationalist parties. In Austria and in Switzerland, the extreme right has shared power in government. For the first time ever, a member of the far-right British National Party has been elected to the London Assembly.

One common electoral platform for all parties of the extreme right is propagating the idea that Muslims are a problem community; a community to be feared; that they are outsiders, and followers of a fixed and outdated faith; and that their sacred book is a mediaeval manual that has no place in the modern world.

In some countries (though not all) this tactic seems to be paying electoral dividends. The extreme right's rhetoric says that Europe is essentially a Judaeo-Christian construct, which implies that the practice of Islam has no place in Europe. In more practical terms, it denotes opposing Turkey's candidacy of the European Union. It also includes opposing the wearing of religious headscarves in public institutions, Muslim faith schools, and the building of large, purpose-built mosques.

Mosques, in particular are being painted by the extreme right as centres of extremism, rather than places of worship. At the time of writing, parties of the extreme right are actively opposing planned mosques in Berne, London, Cologne and Amsterdam, among many other European cities.

Media pressures

Not unnaturally, where Europe's governments, politicians, opinion-formers and voters lead, colleagues in the media are often not far behind, if behind at all. In all countries (developed and developing), what the state and leading politicians say and do is not just a significant part of the public conversation – it helps to inform and shape the tone of that conversation, which, in turn, influences what voters think and how they behave.

Take the following example from the UK. For the past few years, a large newspaper's internet site has hosted a regular discussion strand in which readers are invited to discuss a 'Muslim' topic. In the month of February 2008, such discussion topics have included the following:

- Islam v. celebrity worship: which is the greatest threat?
- What do you think when you see Muslims in the same queue as you at the airport?
- Should Muslims who want Sharia law leave the country?

In one particular thread entitled: Would you go to a mosque? Some of the answers printed on its website included: 'Yes, with a bag of semtex', and 'Only to kick their backsides'. The site is not hosted by a fringe publication of extremists but one of Britain's largest-selling newspapers.

Giving space to the idea that Muslims are outsiders to Europe is not restricted to this paper. In the same month, the BBC's *Newsnight* programme opened a discussion strand on its website following a speech from the Archbishop of Canterbury on the topic of Sharia law in Britain. The site recorded more than 500 comments such as:

'If they [Muslims] can't live under our laws, the answer is simple – leave.' And this: 'Where will this stop? What next to "appease" the "new people" who keep arriving in huge numbers. That is not xenophobic. That is simply me trying to save my country and culture from being killed off.'⁸

Yet another catalytic ingredient is the tendency of mainstream media colleagues to provide space for minority extremist voices – thus having the result of magnifying the extent to which they represent mainstream opinion in the eyes of the reading and viewing public. This is frequently the case with the reporting of the views of Muslim extremists, a handful of whom have become household names as a direct result.

However, this is also now the case with extreme voices from the other side. Following a deliberate editorial decision to widen contribution to their programmes, the BBC interviews representatives of less mainstream groups on its main news. These include Muslim groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, but also the British National Party (BNP). In an interview on *Newsnight* on 6 March 2008, for example, the BNP's leader, Nick Griffin, was allowed to broadcast the claim that Muslims are responsible for introducing drug abuse into Britain.

Add to this an emerging body of new and tougher anti-terror laws; more publicly funded research and opinion on the topic of Muslims and violence from universities and think tanks; frequent public statements from the security services of terrorism plots involving Muslims; regular coverage on terror trials and terror suspects; repeated controversies over images of the prophet Muhammad; the presence of undercover reporters and intelligence personnel in mosques; regular opinion polls asking people of their views on Muslims, and you can begin to understand why stories on immigration and on 'problem Muslims' are rarely out of the news headlines – as well as the effect that this might be having on media consumers.

In Images of Islam in the UK, a report published in July 2008 for Channel 4, researchers from the School of Journalism at the University of Cardiff analysed the content of 974 articles about British Muslims in the UK press between 2000 and 2008.

They found that four out of the five most common newspaper topics identified Islam or Muslims in relation to threats, problems, or opposition to dominant British values. They also found that the most common nouns used in relation to British Muslims were: extremist, Islamist, suicide-bomber and militant. The most common adjectives used were: radical, fanatical, fundamentalist, extremist and militant.

The researchers also assessed newspaper images used to illustrate articles concerning Muslims. They found that Muslim men were often illustrated using police photographs, and that locations for these images often included police stations and law courts.

Tensions leading to misunderstanding between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe are of course not new. Relations on the whole have had their fair share of hiccups. In his book, *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, the British writer and former diplomat Charles Le Gai Eaton says the bad times exceed the good. The present, largely peaceful situation, he believes, in which no country in Europe is officially at war with a Muslim-majority state, is unusual in history.

The historical record is clearly full of accounts of wars and mistrust between Muslims and Europe's pre-existing powers. But the history of the encounter between the two is more complex than that as the following section will illustrate.

Islam's European journey

Islam was born in the early 7th century in the city of Mecca, an ancient pilgrimage site in modern-day Saudi Arabia. According to Muslim tradition, it was in the year 610 that Muhammad, a 40-year-old merchant from one of the city's governing families, began to receive revelations from God through the archangel Gabriel, while meditating in a hilltop cave. Muhammad declared that Islam did not represent a new tradition, but sought to revive the testaments of earlier Biblical prophets such as Abraham, Lot, Moses and Jesus.

Very soon after Muhammad's death in 632, his successors took their prophet's message both east and west. The first Muslim armies knocked on the doors of Spain in 711, defeating a Visigothic army. That same year, Muslims entered the province of Sind in what today is southern Pakistan, before journeying 1,200 kilometres along the route of the river Indus and crossing into China.

Muhammad's death created an immediate power vacuum and led to the first of many divisions with the emergence of Shia and Sunni traditions. The new Muslim communities lacked a single leader and the new Islamic territories were in effect a network of sometimes overlapping, ideologically different and argumentative empires.

In the 15th century Islam reached the Balkans where it remains integral to the culture and identity of the peoples of several countries in south-eastern Europe such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. There was trade with Western Christendom throughout the middle ages, and the tempo increased after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. From the 16th century Western Europe began to develop close contact with Muslim countries through trade, scholarship and empire and, from the 19th century, new communities of Muslims began to emerge in countries such as France, the Netherlands, and the UK, where there were strong links to South and East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

It is difficult to describe these centuries of relationships in a single sentence or even a single paragraph. Along with trade and friendship, many of these encounters were indeed characterised by colonisation, conflict and inevitable mistrust. Islamic empires and Europe's pre-existing powers were frequently at war. The last caliphate, the Ottoman empire with its capital in Istanbul, was formally dissolved five years after the end of the First World War, in 1923. Four hundred years earlier, Spain's Jews were expelled by the Christian rulers, followed by the remaining Muslim population in 1609. Even earlier, Christians and Jews had been intermittently expelled from Muslim-ruled Al-Andalus.

But there is another, and much less acknowledged side to Islam's 1,300-year presence in Europe. Most (if not all) of the world's great empires have patronised knowledge and learning, both to further the limits of human knowledge, and for political and other ends. Wealthy dominions can afford to fund scientists, artists, philosophers, architects, writers,

poets and mystics. The Islamic empires were no different, and centres of innovation and learning were found all over the 'Muslim world' in cities such as Bokhara in Central Asia, Baghdad and Damascus in the Middle East, and Córdoba, Granada, Istanbul and Toledo in Europe.

The diversity of Europe's Islamic-era legacy includes figures such as Abul Walid Ibn-Rushd (Averroes), a 12th-century jurist and philosopher who is credited with reviving rationalism and Greek thought in the continent. It also includes the mystic Muhyiddin Ibn-Arabi (also in 12th-century Spain). Ibn-Rushd is a favourite among Europe's present-day intellectuals, and Ibn-Arabi is regarded as one of the giants of Sufism in both east and west.

Knowledge and innovation emerge when people from new cultures, speaking different languages share spaces with majority communities in an atmosphere of trust, friendship and security. Europe and the United States provide such spaces, which is why people from many minority backgrounds continue to excel in all walks of life including the arts, sciences, law and politics, just as they did in the past.

The Muslim presence in Europe today

In the Europe of today, Islam has more than 120 million followers. The overwhelming majority are born into Muslim families and a minority make an active choice to convert. The largest communities are in Turkey (which has a population of some 80 million). Russia and the former Soviet republics in Europe have around 20 million Muslims.

Table 1: Figures relating to Muslim populations in the EU

| Country | Muslim population (millions) |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| France | 3.5* |
| Germany | 3.4 |
| UK | 1.6 |
| Netherlands | 0.95 |
| Spain | 0.8 – 1.0 |
| Italy | 0.72 |
| Belgium | 0.36 |

* Minimum estimate.
Sources: Theological Media and Information Service (Germany); National Statistics (UK); Statistics Netherlands; Immigrants Statistics Dossier (Italy); Statistik Austria; University of Leuven (Belgium).

Some 20 million Muslims live in the European Union. Within the EU, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania have long-standing communities of indigenous Muslims, in some cases with roots stretching back many centuries. The majority, however, came to Europe after the end of the Second World War from the countries of Asia (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan), North and West Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia) and Turkey. In more recent years, newer arrivals have come from conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Kashmir and Somalia. They include students, professionals, the unskilled and refugees.

Housing, education and employment

According to the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency, based in Vienna, new arrivals into the EU from the developing world tend to live in poorer housing compared with the settled population and they are also more likely to live in poorer neighbourhoods and experience greater overcrowding and homelessness, to earn lower incomes and to underperform educationally.⁹ In many cases, their living standards improve with time and with the passing of generations, but this is not an automatic process.

Significant numbers of pupils with family origins in the developing world have been a part of the education systems of several EU member states (for example the UK, France and the Netherlands), who experienced inward migration increasingly since the end of the Second World War. However, in Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and most of the newer EU member states, their presence in state schools is much more recent as these countries move from a pattern of outward migration to inward migration.

The Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) compiles data on the educational performance of children born abroad, or whose family origins are outside the OECD. Overall, the study shows that overseas-born children have much lower mathematics and literacy scores compared with other children. In the UK, however, children from Muslim families on the whole achieve better results than the average for white children.¹⁰

[Institutions, leadership and the state](#)

Institutions that meet the needs of Europe's Muslims include community and welfare organisations; organisations that help with employment and integration; mosques and places of worship; full- and part-time schools that teach languages and religion; and groups for women and young people. Some are organised on religious, others on ethnic, lines.

With the exception of a handful of flagship projects the majority of mosques in the EU are small buildings in residential areas, or temporary spaces, often within walking distance of the communities they serve. Some of these are Shia and Alevi but most belong to the Sunni tradition. Most mosques also host after-school religion classes for children.

Most EU countries have established umbrella federations and organisations that liaise with public bodies and with governments. A number of EU countries (including France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK) have elected members of parliaments who are Muslim, or who come from Muslim families.

Six of the 785 members of the European Parliament are Muslim.

In many EU countries, Muslim groups are entitled to receive state assistance. Some state authorities (such as France and Spain) have formal co-operation agreements with designated Muslim representative bodies. Others (such as the UK and the Netherlands) provide funds to a larger number of groups.

Security, terrorism and intelligence

Since the bomb attacks in London and Madrid and foiled plots in the UK and Germany, surveillance of terror suspects has been stepped up, and laws penalising extremist behaviour have been tightened.

Al-Qaeda-linked attacks in the EU, however, are still rare compared with other terrorist attacks. But intelligence agencies and police forces are warning against complacency, and say that the data (see below) do not include the many known terror plots that they are working to overcome. This, they argue, partly explains why more Muslims are being arrested.

Table 2: Number of failed, foiled and successfully executed attacks in 2007*

| | Islamist | Separatist | Left-wing | Right-wing | Other |
|---------|----------|------------|-----------|------------|-------|
| France | 0 | 253 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| Germany | 1 | 15 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Spain | 0 | 264 | 8 | 0 | 7 |
| UK | 2 | – | – | – | – |
| EU | 4 | 532 | 21 | 1 | 24 |

* Table headings as used by Europol.
Source: Europol 2008.
TE-SAT 2008: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report.

* Table headings as used by Europol.
 Source: Europol 2008.
TE-SAT 2008: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report.

Note: the UK reported 203 arrests of suspects under the Terrorism Act 2000 but did not provide a breakdown into the four categories. The UK authorities suggest that the vast majority were in the Islamist category.

Table 3: Number of arrested suspects in 2007*

| Country | Islamist | Separatist | Left-wing | Right-wing |
|---------------|----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| France | 91 | 315 | 3 | 0 |
| Germany | 3 | 8 | 4 | 0 |
| Spain | 48 | 196 | 17 | 0 |
| UK | – | – | – | – |
| EU (excl. UK) | 201 | 548 | 48 | 44 |

Our Shared Europe: project concept

This section of the report introduces the project objectives and intended outcomes that were defined at the beginning of the project development process.

The following presents the results of a consultation exercise in which groups of experts and potential stakeholders in ten countries were asked to comment on the approach as outlined here. This exercise took place between October 2007 and March 2008, with most of the country visits taking place between January and March 2008.

Project aims and objectives

The project aim is to create stronger bonds of trust between Muslims and other majority and minority communities in Europe, and to do this by creating more understanding and awareness of the many contributions that Muslims have made in history and in present-day Europe. The more specific objectives are to:

- create a shared understanding among all Europeans of Islam's past and present contribution to European societies and identities

- generate awareness that Judaeo-Christian and Islamic intellectual and cultural roots have together created Europe's unique character and that this profile is one of its biggest strengths today
- encourage all Europeans to take ownership of this aspect of our common identity and to help reshape it for the 21st century.

The importance of a shared Europe

As mentioned earlier, the demographics of Europe have been changing for some decades and Muslims account for a growing number of those travelling to, doing business with and settling down in Europe. Less well known, however, is the degree to which Muslim citizens are contributing to the development of many European societies. Also less well known is that Islamic and Arab civilisations and Muslim communities have made a significant contribution to Europe's history and civilisation.

Europeans draw on cultural and intellectual roots that have been shaped by a whole variety of beliefs and ways of knowing. These include Romano-Graeco traditions, Christianity, Judaism and other faiths, notably Islam.

Contemporary European culture and society is the result of an intermingling between many cultural and linguistic influences. Understanding, recognising and harnessing their combined potential is integral to developing stronger and more creative European societies.

In recent years, however, there is growing evidence that Muslims are being viewed by the majority populations in Europe as having little or nothing to do with European creativity, culture and modernity. Islam is often viewed as the 'other'.

At a political level this view of Islam as an alien culture finds expression in movements such as the British National Party, the Swiss People's Party and the Flemish Vlaams Belang, as well as other political parties that occupy the farthest end of the European right; and it finds occasional sympathetic echoes in more mainstream politics and press.

The view of Islam as 'other' has also given rise to European countries with large Muslim populations such as Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania, being cast as outsiders, banging on the door of a Europe allegedly founded upon an exclusively Christian heritage.

This is among the reasons why some of Europe's Muslims – including those of the second and third generations – feel isolated from the mainstream of European societies. At the same time, dangerous narratives are being constructed by extremist Muslim groups. These deliberately seek to contradict the view that Islam is part of Europe's culture and identity and actively espouse an interpretation of Muslims as standing apart from other communities in European society.

The result is a risk that generations of Muslims will grow up largely alienated from the heritage of their continent and ignorant of the important contribution Muslims have made – and are making – to its evolution and development. Equally, generations of non-Muslims will grow up unaware of the shared heritage of the European civilisation.

This heritage is not just in the domes, libraries and fountains of southern Spain, which do provide a reminder of a Muslim society in Europe, but in the flourishing Muslim communities that exist in every major European country, as well as in the intellectual furniture of Europe's thinkers and creators. At the same time, many other Europeans will be ignorant of the rich debt they owe to Islamic culture and thought. This parallel ignorance among non-Muslims and Muslims, fuels mistrust, isolation and extremism on both sides.

Outcomes of Our Shared Europe

Our Shared Europe is a long-term programme of projects and initiatives that aims to achieve the following three outcomes, initially within a five-year period:

1 influence public debate and encourage thought about the contribution that Muslims have made – and are continuing to make – to European societies and the construction of modern national and cultural identities; this will be aimed at leading groups of decision-makers, innovators and influencers – particularly those in the 18 to 40 age group across all communities

2 change perceptions among a wider public – both Muslim and non-Muslim – of the past, present and future Muslim contribution to European society and identity

3 educate the next generation so that they are better informed about the Muslim contribution to Europe and provide them with new transcultural leadership skills that make positive use of this understanding and knowledge.

Our Shared Europe is an ambitious programme and the five-year timescale is viewed both as an initial investment period and a way of being able to monitor progress and reach interim goals. If the programme attracts sufficient partnerships and funding from different sources it should be possible to extend its lifetime quite significantly.

Annexe 1 is an initial contribution to the possible activities that could be incorporated within the programme. The list was designed to focus debate during the consultation exercise and is not a pre-ordained, final programme.

The consultation exercise

‘The project is ambitious; maybe over ambitious. Ambition is good. But if you fail, there could be disaster.’

Academic and policy-maker, Netherlands

After an initial consultation meeting in London with a group of UK-based experts in October 2007, the ideas in the previous section were tested in interviews and round-table meetings with over 150 professionals from 17 cities in ten countries.

These countries were (in alphabetical order): Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, France, Germany, Morocco, the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, and the UK. Interviewees also came from Portugal.

The experts that we met were drawn from: higher education and research (including teachers and those who work with young people); Muslim community non-governmental organisations and faith groups (including religious leaders); city and metropolitan authorities; the creative industries (artists, film-makers and playwrights); media; and public relations.

Interest among the participants was very high. Many travelled far to attend meetings or interviews. In other cases, universities, think tanks and other organisations were happy to take the lead in hosting meetings and discussions with a wide range of experts.

In each meeting/interview, participants were asked the following:

- is there a need to make a significant breakthrough in restoring trust between Muslims and non-Muslims?
- is the British Council an appropriate organisation to take this initiative?
- what are the strengths and weaknesses, rewards and risks from each of the ideas contained in the concept paper?
- how can the ideas be improved, or refined?
- what other approaches could the British Council consider in addition to (or as an alternative to) those contained in the concept paper?

Among those interviewed, there was close to unanimity on three things:

- the project is ambitious
- the fall in trust between communities needs urgent attention
- the British Council is bold, brave and prescient in its desire to make a difference.

A clear majority of Muslims and others from Muslim cultural backgrounds also agreed that there is a real need for public recognition of the contribution of their cultures to the making of Europe.

Many respondents said that we cannot be selective about our shared history and that if the history involves pleasure as well as pain, then this initiative needs to find ways of talking about the tragedies as much as the triumphs.

Many said we need to be alive to those who will oppose this project, particularly those in the community of opinion-formers who do not accept that Europe has anything other than Judaeo-Christian roots. Several respondents said 'this is a dangerous project' not just because it challenges the dominant narrative, but also because its emphasis on Islam could increase the perceived 'otherness' of Muslims.

‘We feel we are trapped in a cellar and lack oxygen. Your project gives us that oxygen.’

Community activist, France

Though the phrase is not wholly appropriate, the Islamic faith today is, in a similar way to Christianity and Judaism, a ‘broad church’ comprising people with vastly differing views on the nature of God, prophets, heaven and hell, tradition and modernity.

The divisions began from the time Muhammad lay on his deathbed in the year 632. Today, there are hundreds of traditions inside Islam. The Our Shared Europe team met with members from a small, but diverse selection, as well as those born inside Muslim cultures but who no longer see themselves as Muslim.

There was strong support for the concept from members of faith and community-based and advocacy groups comprising or representing Muslims in all of the countries that we visited. Offers to become partners in the venture came thick and fast.

Many were equally impressed at being asked for their views at such an early stage in the project. ‘Usually, we are presented with the results of these exercises,’ said one representative of a Moroccan workers organisation in Spain.

As we began to dig deeper with questions and discussion, pain and feelings of humiliation were constantly being mentioned. ‘When the Federal Chancellor says that Europe is based on Judaeo-Christian heritage, we feel humiliated,’ said a

German–Bosnian that we visited in Berlin. A Pakistani–Scot living in Glasgow, who had travelled to Edinburgh to meet the research team, said: ‘I feel a real sense of despondency. I have been in race relations for 20 years. Now I am hearing that multiculturalism is dead. Tomorrow, will they say that race relations legislation was a mistake?’

‘It is important for new generations to know that there were moments of success,’ said a member of one of Cairo’s many Christian communities. But along with plaudits such as this, came a number of concerns, as well as advice for the project team. Perhaps at the top of the list of concerns were the risks that come with an approach that is rooted in communicating Europe’s Islamic-era history.

In the UK and in France there was concern that the concept will (for good reasons) place Muslims in the public spotlight. An unintended consequence of this is that it could make Muslims more (rather than less) of a target for those in politics, the media and among opinion-formers who see Islam as a threat and Muslims as a problem. The founders of a popular women’s centre in Berlin said that they feared any backlash could make their work more difficult. To others, Our Shared Europe seemed to chime with government attempts at managing Muslim communities. ‘I showed the paper to some of my friends and colleagues,’ said a student leader from London. They replied: “Why us again? What’s the agenda?”

Interfaith representatives in France and the UK told us that members of other faiths are likely to view the project as yet more special treatment for Muslims, which has the potential to create resentment between the faiths. ‘Perhaps you could turn this into a project on the contribution of many faiths to life in Europe,’ suggested one participant from Cambridge. ‘I know from my Muslim friends that they will not want to be exclusively singled out.’ Some suggested that the project needs to go deep inside the more deprived areas where misperceptions and mistrust are often strongest.

In France and in Spain, representatives of modernising and reformist Islamic traditions said that the project needs to work with Muslim communities and help them to appreciate and celebrate the diversity in their faith, and to promote women's empowerment in Muslim communities. 'We need intra-Muslim dialogue,' said one. 'Will your project help us to do this?' she asked. Other groups, such as the Alevis of Germany and Turkey, also agreed that Our Shared Europe needs to help Muslims appreciate freedoms and diversity.

A minority felt that the project has the wrong priorities. One interviewee from Germany who has renounced her Muslim faith, said that the concept paper represents a backward step. 'You cannot recreate or live in the past, and you need to be consistent. If you believe in human rights, then religious headscarves and girls forbidden to go for mixed swimming is a step back for human rights.'

‘If you teach history to a pupil in a way that says: you have made a contribution, especially those who live in disadvantaged areas, then that pupil’s self-esteem will go up.’

Teacher, Belgium

The consultation included meetings and interviews with teachers, educationists, education policy-makers, and professional youth workers. A critical question in these meetings was to understand the extent to which schools’ curricula and textbooks are being redrafted to take account of less didactic and more analytical approaches to the teaching of history. This approach includes teaching about events such as wars or disease pandemics from different perspectives and encouraging children to draw their own conclusions based on the evidence presented to them.

We learned that textbook and curriculum reform is well under way in many countries, including Spain, Turkey and the UK. ‘Today, the teaching of history is impartial,’ one teacher of history in Madrid told us. He showed us examples of textbooks that describe in colourful detail Spain’s Islamic past. In Turkey, an educational adviser to the government told us that the government of the Justice and Development Party was determined to align the country’s teaching methods with the best of those in Europe.

Many of the participants told us that children often learn as much from their teachers as they do from books, and unless more attention is paid to teacher training, the impact of new curricula or reworked textbooks will be less than what it could be. In Egypt, a leading educationist advised that the approach in Our Shared Europe needs to be modified. 'It is important that children understand that knowledge is not a one-way street,' she said. 'You need to include the fact that Muslim scientists learned from their predecessors and also contributed new insights. What you don't want happening is for children to think that we don't need to learn because we were leaders of knowledge in the past.'

Many primary and secondary schools in Europe are rapidly changing from being majority-white to having a more ethnically mixed intake. Sometimes, this change is being experienced in the space of a few years, as is the case in one primary school in Madrid that we visited. Many schools are unprepared for the change and do not have the skills or experience to serve pupils from a wide range of backgrounds. Here, the head teacher told us that a primary concern was in not having a common language to teach those children who enter school unable to speak Spanish. He revealed that his staff were discovering that English could be a more effective medium of communicating with children who come from a diverse set of places spanning Africa and South-East Asia.

International pupil exchanges are a well-established way of giving young people early exposure to new cultures. Though not part of the Our Shared Europe concept note, this issue frequently came up in the consultations in many countries.

In Egypt, the Our Shared Europe team visited the schools' team at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the country's national library and science centre, which was established in 2003. Three-quarters of a million children visit the centre each year and one of the centre's goals is to provide children with a stronger awareness of the different influences that have contributed to the making of modern Egypt.

These include the ancient Egyptians, the Arabs, the Persians, Ottomans and modern European influences. What the library and science centre is trying to achieve in Egypt is what Our Shared Europe wants to do on the other side of the Mediterranean.

However, we were told by staff that the European contribution to Egypt is often the hardest to communicate. 'We get Nobel laureates to talk to the children. But it is hard for us to convince them that Europe has had a positive influence when they see such double standards in Western policies in this region,' one member of staff told us. Children say things like: 'You created Osama Bin Laden. You [in the West] created Saddam Hussein. There needs to be honesty about the past. It is important to acknowledge these things, otherwise nothing will change. The West talks about democracy and science. But the practice defeats what you preach.'

‘We have got to stop looking at Moroccans as “subjects” and start treating them as viewers.’

Television reporter, Netherlands

It is widely believed that the nature of media reporting is contributing both to disaffection among Muslim communities in Europe, as well as mistrust of Muslims among wider populations in Europe. In many, many instances, Muslims are avoiding contact with journalists for fear of being misrepresented. In our interviews with journalists and public relations professionals, the Our Shared Europe team first tried to establish whether reporting could be improved. We also sought their views on the concept paper and whether media institutions would like to become more involved with the project.

The first of these was not an easy question, and made more difficult by the fact that some journalists do not like to be questioned about their craft, and tend to become defensive if criticised. An editor of a newspaper in Bosnia-Herzegovina said that the project was important and urgent. However, out of all the journalists we met, few would acknowledge that standards of reporting could be improved, or that media portrayals of Muslims might be contributing to a worsening of relations between communities. Only one (a television reporter from Amsterdam) acknowledged this and said that one reason is that people from Muslim cultural backgrounds are mostly regarded as ‘topics’ for news coverage, rather than viewers, readers and listeners.

One newspaper reporter from Spain said that more accurate or nuanced coverage was difficult as new technology has made journalists busier than ever. They are required to serve many masters (print, online, podcasts, and so on) with little or no extra time. Moreover, journalists are often not trained or educated in the topics they are writing about. A journalist from Belgium said that training courses are a good idea, but should be short and presented in such a way that newsrooms do not see them as an attempt to censor or spin a particular story.

The recommendations from journalists were not restricted to media issues. The Amsterdam television reporter said that the project's biggest contribution would be to bring people together, possibly through pupil exchanges. The editor of an Islamic newspaper in Bosnia-Herzegovina said Our Shared Europe should be an independent foundation carrying the names of major Jewish, Christian and Muslim philosophers from the Middle Ages.

From the world of PR we were told by one practitioner in Spain that if Muslims learned how to effect better PR, the tone and standard of coverage might improve. One PR executive from London said that if the British Council is looking to create new bonds of trust between peoples, it is important not to generate public debates with the media in attendance, as these are likely to be broadcast or written about in such a way that differences between people will be amplified. This could have the effect of undermining attempts at building bridges.

‘I could cut and paste these [OSE] objectives into my own work.’

City council official, Paris

It is an unwritten law in public policy that examples of sensible, good practice in public administration are more likely to be found locally, away from the hothouse of national-level politics. With this in mind, the Our Shared Europe team spent time talking to many local officials, politicians and people involved in community development projects.

In two city councils (Amsterdam and Paris), we were met with enthusiastic support from officials working to create better relations between communities. ‘This project does exactly what I want to do locally,’ said one official who works in the mixed Amsterdam suburb of Slotervaart. Another official from the city council of Paris told us excitedly: ‘I could cut and paste these objectives into my own work.’

We paid a brief visit to a new centre for Islamic cultures that has been established by the mayor of Paris in the heart of a suburb with a large West African population. The centre aims to present new knowledge, art, architecture, film and books from the Middle East and Africa. There are classes in calligraphy and in Arabic language, and all Parisians are encouraged to use the centre. An official from the centre said that they had deliberately chosen to use the word ‘Islam’ in the centre’s title, in part to rescue the word from extremists, but that this had been controversial and the centre had been criticised in the press for this reason.

There was also enthusiastic support for the concept paper from an official running a local council-managed young people's centre in Blackburn, a mixed-community town in the north of England where unemployment and educational underachievement are high. If he had a request it was that the project activities included increasing opportunities for pupil exchanges. He told us that taking young people abroad on structured one- or two-week visits was often a 'life-changing experience', which had the effect of transforming young people's perceptions of different communities, and their perception of poverty. However, he said that they were expensive and poor communities were unable to afford them. The last such exchange he had organised was ten years ago.

An alternative view came from Berlin from an official working with communities in Wedding, one of the poorest areas of the city where 40 per cent of the population comes from a minority community (half of this figure accounting for Turkish-speaking households). Two-thirds of Wedding's children live in homes where parents are on state benefits. He told us: 'You are trying to combat prejudice through education. This is not possible.' He added: 'The elites are among the most educated, but are also among the most prejudiced. It is not that they don't know their history, it is that they have no contact with Muslim communities.'

He went on to describe a successful community building project that his department initiated called 'Building the future'. Fifteen young people (under the age of 25) were selected to renovate an old swimming pool in their neighbourhood. Half were from Turkish-speaking households, the other half from German-speaking families. The project's aim was to create stronger bonds between the groups, by getting them to work together on a shared activity, and encouraging them to learn about each other's culture. This latter objective, he said, was achieved by taking the group to Istanbul where they visited different public baths and learned about the development of Turkish *hamam* culture.

‘The history of science is the history that we all share.’

Science historian, Belgium

‘You are walking into a minefield.’

Political scientist, Egypt

In each country visited, the Our Shared Europe team met with members of the research community. They included geographers, historians, Islamic studies specialists, philosophers, policy researchers and sociologists. The meetings took place in British Council offices, in universities and in think tanks. The aims of these meetings were to get subject specialists to test our assumptions in Our Shared Europe, as well as the proposed method of working, and to elicit additional ideas.

On the whole, we met with broad support for the aims of creating stronger bonds of trust between Europe’s communities. There were many plaudits for the project in taking this initiative. And many individuals and institutions in both developed and developing countries were keen to play a formal role in the project. ‘This project is ambitious, but worthy,’ said an academic from a university in Scotland.

As you would expect, the offers of help from researchers mostly centred on providing research support to the project: for example, we had offers from a university in the Netherlands and from a think tank in Brussels to carry out a baseline study of perceptions of Europe’s Islamic cultural roots. Another idea was to train more PhD-level researchers from under-represented communities as part of the project’s leadership development programme.

We also asked researchers from different disciplines to review the content and methodology in the concept paper. Here, the views were more mixed, and varied according to a number of interdependent factors including: the discipline of the researcher, his or her individual cultural or faith experience, and his or her approach to the question of *laïcism* as an instrument of public policy.

The strongest support came from historians of science and from non-*laïcist* Islamic studies specialists. One professor of the history of science from Belgium said that Europe's Islamic-era historical contributions are mostly in the fields of engineering, science, medicine and philosophy. This means, he added, that the 'history of science is the history that we all share'. Commending the project document, one Islamic studies professor from Egypt said: 'The authors of the paper are "intellectuals and sincere people"'. Another university professor from Rabat told us: 'There are extremists on both sides. But there are also people on both sides who can unite.'

As with every other group we had interviewed, several academics warned that such an explicit focus on 'Muslim contributions' would generate vocal opposition, which the project organisers will need to be alert to – not least because any damage from the opposition runs the risk of undermining the good that the project will engender. 'I support your aims, but there are many intellectuals and academics who do not share these [Our Shared Europe] opinions,' said one professor in Bosnia-Herzegovina. 'Their voices are more powerful than ours.'

A professor of political science in Egypt told us: 'You are walking into a minefield. Be prepared to be attacked from those Muslims and non-Muslims who see the encounter of Muslims and Europe as one of violence and wars.' A research consultant from the Netherlands said: 'Opponents of this project will say "this is a strategy for Islamic takeover".'

Several academics in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Morocco and in Turkey were not convinced that trust-building is the only reason the British Council is embarking on Our Shared Europe. 'Why the focus on Muslims?' asked one. 'Is this part of a government mission?' asked another. Several researchers were keen to point out that the actions of the UK government (both in the past and in the present) had contributed to the present crisis, which is something that needs to be acknowledged. One researcher from Morocco said: 'You have given a haven to extremists. You give them space in the media. Then they say extreme things and you complain there is mistrust?'

A third group of academics was keen to refine the concept, give it greater rigour and suggest practical ways of taking it forward. Common to this group was the view that the history of Muslims in Europe is contested, which the project concept needs to acknowledge in order to achieve its aims. 'There is a danger that you could over-emphasise the Islamic contribution to Europe,' said one professor from the Netherlands. Another said: 'Your approach is too rosy. Where is the pain?' He proposed three overlapping tracks to Our Shared Europe: 'Swapping treasures ... sharing losses ... celebrating futures.'

A philosophy professor from Turkey, however, said the fact that history is contested should be seen as one of the project's strengths, and an opportunity to be built on. He suggested that this could be used as a way of bringing together leading historians from around the world to produce a consensus text on the history of Muslims in Europe. All facets of this relationship would be reviewed in an attempt to arrive at a consensus.

This was echoed by a sociologist from Bosnia-Herzegovina who studies reconciliation among communities with a history of conflict. She told us that one of the main findings from what is called 'contact studies' is that long-term reconciliation depends on some of the following factors. People need to 'acknowledge injustices and take responsibility to build a future together – those who have been

treated unjustly need to find the strength to forgive and to move forward by thinking of a shared future, but not to forget, nor talk of revenge’.

A political scientist from Egypt said: ‘This project needs to create shared spaces. Places where people from different communities can mix and meet.’ She added: ‘I have lived in the UK, and was really surprised to see that at the weekends, people from different communities did not meet and stayed among their own friends and families.’

‘I want my children to learn about Nietzsche, not Avicenna.’

Academic, France

Throughout the consultation interviews, the voice of *laïcism*, though often a minority view, was a consistent one, particularly among artists, academics and writers in both developed and developing countries.

Their basic argument was that Europe may have had many cultural influences in the past, but its defining characteristics are not those found in Muslim cultures – especially the Muslim communities of Western Europe, which are less educated – but often come from rural areas in developing countries where observance faith is strong. These characteristics can be described as the values of the Enlightenment and include: separation of religion and the state; freedom of speech; democracy and the rule of law; and equal rights for all.

One academic researcher from Morocco said that the project ‘should not encourage religion. People will not be satisfied with mosques and schools. Next, they will want polygamy and hand-chopping.’ And this from a professor in Bosnia-Herzegovina: ‘Europe has certain rules, which should not change because of old beliefs.’

‘I want to defend Muslims against attacks,’ one artist from Belgium said. ‘But I don’t want to unravel the Enlightenment values that we have. Now there are demands for segregated swimming. More veils. More religion. But if I criticise this, the media will paint me as anti-Muslim, which I don’t want to be.’

Summary of recommendations from the consultations

The project's overall aims

Respondents were unanimous in saying that the project is ambitious, but that the British Council is brave and entirely correct in wanting to take steps to restoring trust between Muslims and members of other majority and minority communities. The project's approach – thinking long term and working with large audiences in partnership with other organisations – was also welcomed.

The proposed activities

The consultation used the examples of possible activities as a catalyst of discussion and to gauge the possible implications of each area. The activities are grouped here into coherent sections.

- Conferences, debates and seminars to influence public debate and thinking about the contribution that Muslims have made – and are continuing to make – to European societies and identities. Aimed at decision-makers, innovators and influencers – particularly those in the 18 to 40 age group across all communities, but also members of the current 'authority' generation.

- Training events to help change perceptions among media professionals of the past, present and future Muslim contribution to European society and identity.
- Popularising Muslim contributions to Europe using radio, television, the internet, advertising and cinema; working with broadcasters, media businesses, schools, libraries and youth groups.

Opinions about these first three ideas were mixed.

The majority of respondents agreed that there is a knowledge deficit, and that Muslim contributions to Europe are less well known. Of those that are known, some are downplayed even by those in positions of authority and influence across all sectors. They agreed that this needs to change. They also agreed that changing negative perceptions and restoring trust between Muslims and members of other majority and minority communities is urgent and critical.

However, there was less consensus on whether trust can be restored through a strategy of popularising Muslim contributions to Europe.

Those from Muslim faith-based backgrounds and representatives of municipal authorities where Muslims are in significant numbers were more positive of the approach outlined in the concept paper and appreciated the fact that such an idea has emerged from a mainstream organisation in the EU.

A principal question was the degree to which activities would be public and high profile. Many respondents (from all groups) feared that a series of high-profile debates and conferences about Muslims could make Muslims targets of a possible backlash from those who are already critical of their presence in Europe. This view was also shared by members of the public relations industry.

However, other respondents (from different groups) said that such criticism should not be a reason to hide the truth or censor the past. They argued that the project partners need to anticipate potential negative opinion, and then put in place a response strategy for when this occurs.

An overwhelming majority of respondents called for more and better training of news journalists. But the views from members of the media community were more mixed and ranged from those who were positive about training events aimed at media professionals, to those who were sceptical and saw such activities as being propagandist.

From the academic community, historians of science were strongly supportive, as were other social scientists and members of think tanks. Other academics said that influencing public debate and popularising Muslim contributions to Europe does not automatically lead to changed perceptions – and even has the potential to reinforce existing ideas.

- Our Shared Europe awards scheme.
- Create an online platform combining knowledge of Muslim contributions to Europe.

Both of these strands (and especially the awards scheme) received strong endorsement from respondents with no debate or reservations.

- Educate the next generation so that they are better informed about the Muslim contribution to Europe.

This strand in Our Shared Europe had near-unanimous support from all groups in all countries. The ambition to reach every schoolchild in Europe was welcomed by all, as was the idea of a review of curricula in Europe's schools. Additional ideas to emerge in this strand included projects to improve teacher training and organising classroom exchanges so that as many children as possible get to experience life in a culture that is different from their own.

- Help build new transcultural leadership skills among 10,000 young people from established and disadvantaged communities including Muslims, and those from other minority and majority backgrounds.

This strand received strong endorsement from respondents with no debate or reservations.

Additional recommendations

- An international commission on the history of Muslims and Europe. Respondents from the world of research agreed that more awareness of the Muslim contributions to Europe is important. They also said that success in restoring trust between communities needs all those involved to acknowledge the reasons for anger and mistrust. This is also borne out in the findings of previous British Council consultation exercises in this area of cultural relations.^{11,12} At the same time many researchers also said that the history of Muslim contributions to European culture and identity is a contested one among historians.

The SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, a policy think tank in Turkey, recommended that Our Shared Europe activities include the setting up of an international commission on the history of Muslims and Europe. This commission would explore all aspects of the relationship. It would comprise historians, policy-makers, industry and members of civil society organisations from a broad range of countries and cultural backgrounds. With the backing of the British Council such an exercise could send a strong signal to all communities that Europe's leading institutions are willing to back an exercise that may end up saying things that policy-makers are themselves reluctant to do.

This commission could gather evidence from literature review, expert workshops, public meetings and the internet. It would be a continuing and transparent process and its outreach work would include a direct link to the teaching of history in schools.

Media research

- An overwhelming majority of respondents wanted Our Shared Europe to help change the media narrative of Muslims. Yet many media respondents continually spoke of a culture of denial in newsrooms: that broadcasters, reporters, writers and editors are sceptical of those who claim that the activities of the media have a lasting impact on behaviour, trust or community relations. There is clearly scope for a large-scale research study that assesses the impact on the perceptions of readers, listeners and viewers of media coverage of Islam and Muslims.

Such studies do have an impact on senior media executives and are commonplace in other areas of media coverage and, in some cases, have led to policy changes. For example, in the USA, medical professionals have been calling for more responsibility from US broadcast networks covering school shootings. This is because, some believe, that round-the-clock coverage and graphic detail can influence other children to behave in similar ways.

Volunteer and educational exchanges

- Many respondents said that an important component in creating or restoring trust is for people to spend time with each other, engaged in 'neutral' activities that each regards as important, and which address present and future challenges.

More school links and volunteer exchanges were mentioned often. The British Council is already involved extensively in two such projects: Global Xchange and Connecting Classrooms. The latter aims to involve some six million children by 2010. Global Xchange is aiming for 12,000 volunteer exchanges by 2011. There is scope to increase these numbers substantially and to involve many more exchanges between young people from Muslim backgrounds, who are currently under-represented in these projects as well as the Erasmus scheme, where young people in higher education spend a portion of their study time at an institution in a different country.

Analysis of the consultations

Swapping treasures ...
sharing losses ...
celebrating futures

‘Those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it.’

British Council country director,
paraphrasing a quote from
George Santayana

The overriding aim of Our Shared Europe is to strengthen the bonds of trust between Muslims and other majority and minority communities in Europe, and to do this by creating more understanding and awareness of the many contributions that Muslims have made in history and in present-day Europe.

There are clearly many ways of approaching history in the context of Our Shared Europe. A clear message from the consultation meetings is that the project partners will need to find ways of incorporating a more rounded version of the history of Muslims in Europe; and that trust and reconciliation will depend on, as one respondent from the Netherlands put it,

‘swapping treasures ... sharing losses ... celebrating futures’.

An important lesson from this consultation is that in seeking to build trust, we need to acknowledge the reasons why trust has broken down; some of those reasons are rooted in a history that also includes wars and colonisation, as much as reasons of shared innovation and creativity. Other reasons are rooted very much in the politics of the present. Moving forward is unlikely to happen unless we visit those episodes in a spirit of honesty and openness.

This is why the idea (suggested by the SETA Foundation think tank in Turkey) to create a world commission on the history of Muslims in Europe is a good one. The commission would comprise as many of the world’s historians as necessary, and from a diversity of perspectives. The aim would be to produce a parallel set of narratives or as close an approximation as possible. This work will take at least five years, and would need to be communicated as widely as possible.

One possible model of working is that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC is a global network of the world’s climate scientists, representing governments, universities, non-governmental organisations and industry. It produces periodic reports on the state of global warming, which are based on a review of the latest research from around the world. The IPCC was formed by the United Nations 20 years ago. It has helped to settle an acrimonious debate among scientists over whether humans were causing climate change. The consensus on man-made global warming and massive media and political interest can be traced directly to that initiative, taken more than two decades ago.

A test of faith

In recent years, there have been a large number of initiatives aimed at improving relations, public perceptions and trust between individuals and groups of Muslims and those from other minority and majority communities. Two such initiatives are described in this section.

Among the overriding lessons from these experiences are those that relate to the challenges and the learning that takes place when secular organisations interact with individuals of faith and faith-based groups. Projects devised by secular groups, where the importance of faith was recognised as a reality, seemed better received among Muslim communities than those projects where this was not the case.

Our Shared Europe is not and will not be a faith-based project. But based on the experiences outlined in this section, it is likely to struggle to gain the trust and confidence of many Muslims unless it recognises that faith, for many of its audiences and partners, is more than an annual or weekly ritual, but integral to the business of daily living.

At the same time, Our Shared Europe has been perceived by many (inside and outside the British Council) as a project that promotes religion. It is not, but this perception will need to be discussed openly among partners before it can be laid to rest. The issue of what is 'culture' and what is 'religion' leads to considerable and often intense debate. This, too, will need to be aired and resolved to as great an extent as possible.

The Festival of Muslim Cultures

The Festival of Muslim Cultures was a four-year initiative (from 2003 to 2007) from a group of UK-based experts from different cultural backgrounds with experience in the arts world. The aim was to create a nationwide cultural festival that would challenge misperceptions about the Muslim world.

In an independently commissioned evaluation report,¹³ the Festival Director said that the trustees 'wanted to show that the cultural contributions that Muslims have made to the West are not confined to the historical past but that the rich cultures of the Muslim world are part and parcel of British life and share many values with the contemporary West'. The festival organisers also set out to challenge the idea that there is no single, monolithic Muslim community.

The festival did not promote the religion of Islam, avoided using the words 'Islam' or 'Islamic' and chose not to work through Britain's mosque networks. It sought to explore how pre-Islamic cultures have also shaped the cultural diversity of the Muslim world. Events, talks, exhibitions and readings in most of the major UK arts and culture institutions were organised, and had enthusiastic support from many curators and museum directors.

However, the group found fund-raising difficult and also had comparatively little success in attracting members of Muslim communities, especially those who come from households where families are less likely to visit museums and galleries.

One of the reasons why the Festival of Muslim Cultures failed to engage Muslim audiences was that it was regarded by many believers as an attempt to rewrite the history of their religion. In portraying Muslims and their cultural contributions as both influencing – and being influenced by – other cultures, the festival organisers were historically accurate. But this is not how the majority of believers (of any religion) view their faith. Most believers believe out of a conviction that theirs is the one, true God; that prophets perform miracles; or that good Muslims can produce good science.

Claiming evidence to the contrary might well be accurate in the scientific or historical sense, but an approach that is rooted in the history of ideas appears not to have helped in strengthening bonds of trust between those who believe and those who do not.

1001 Inventions

1001 Inventions comprises a travelling exhibition, website (www.1001inventions.com) and a set of educational materials that communicates what it calls '1,000 years of missing history'. This was the period between the 7th and the 15th century when science and learning were advancing in large parts of the world, particularly those that were ruled by Muslims.

The project seeks to build bridges by communicating the idea that Muslims from past times helped to develop much of the science, technology and medicine that we take for granted today. In contrast to the Festival of Muslim Cultures the exhibition regards the observance of religion as being central to the lives and the work of many scientists and engineers from the past.

The exhibition was put together by a private UK-based organisation, the Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilisation. It cost £600,000 to produce. Roughly half of the funding came from UK government departments, with the remainder raised from businesses and wealthy individuals. News of the exhibition has travelled well. In several of the Our Shared Europe country consultations, representatives of Muslim community non-governmental organisations asked if the British Council would help with funding to bring it to their country.

Since its launch in 2007, 1001 Inventions has been on display in science museums in Cardiff, Manchester and Sheffield. It has recently ended its London showing. The exhibition is widely seen as a success and has led to at least one imitation (see www.sultansofscience.com). The museums where it has been displayed have reported increased visitor numbers and it has received additional funding from the Abdul Latif

Jameel Co. Ltd to tour 20 countries in the Middle East and in the United States, starting in 2009.

Between March and May 2006, 57,000 people visited the exhibition at the Museum of Science and Industry, in Manchester, UK. Some 23,000 (40 per cent) were visitors from Muslim households and 10,000 from this group were first-time visitors to the museum.

An external evaluation report concluded that the exhibition had a different impact on Muslim and non-Muslim visitors, with Muslim visitors more receptive to the messages and taking greater pride in their heritage and identity.

The statement that different cultures have learned and can learn from one another, received the most positive responses, with agreement from 87 per cent of Muslim visitors and 73 per cent of non-Muslims.

In other respects non-Muslim visitors were less impressed. Forty-five per cent agreed with the statement that the displays had changed their opinions on the history of science (compared with 90 per cent of Muslim visitors). Forty-nine per cent of non-Muslim visitors agreed with the statement that there is 1,000 years of missing history (compared with 82 per cent of Muslim visitors).

Was scientific inventiveness by Muslims inspired by faith? Eighty-seven per cent of Muslim visitors disagreed with this suggestion, along with 96 per cent of non-Muslim visitors.

One of the reasons why 1001 Inventions was more popular among many Muslim audiences was because it was conceived and led by an organisation of predominantly Muslim academics – the content was not produced in partnership with any of its external advisers or funders. Another reason was because it suggested that there was something ‘special’ about science, technology and engineering under Islamic rule; that perhaps the many developments in mathematics, astronomy, surgery, optics and agriculture might not have come about under a

different system of government. The exhibition's message that 'we did it first', is what gave many of the visitors the pride in their heritage and identity.

One of the lessons from both these examples and the consultation was that Our Shared Europe should be heavily directed at the European non-Muslim communities. Not as a way of promoting Islam but of developing their understanding of European cultural development. In this way many of the concerns from within the Muslim communities may be addressed too.

‘Half of my family is Dutch. The other half is Moroccan. When 9/11 was happening my Dutch family asked: “Why are you Moroccans bombing the twin towers?” My Moroccan family has contributed to Dutch society for 35 years. I can’t understand how people so close to you can change their image just like that.’

Public sector employee, Netherlands

In 2006, the British Council published a short book – *British Muslims: Media Guide* – in partnership with the Association of Muslim Social Scientists. The project was well received and was a well-intentioned attempt at providing background and context to media reports on the Middle East and Islamic affairs. Before and since, there have been many media features and documentary projects that aim to present a many-sided view of Muslim life. These include live reports from the Hajj, Muslim participants on popular television shows such as *Changing Rooms* and *The Apprentice*, a Muslim Miss England, news anchors with a Muslim heritage, and a forthcoming documentary series on BBC television focusing on Islamic-era developments in science and engineering. At one level at least, the UK broadcast media seem to be doing a stellar job in communicating the Our Shared Europe agenda, without even being asked.

Yet, as the Cardiff University report *Images of Islam* demonstrates, four in five of the most common newspaper-topics relating to Muslims identified them alongside threats, problems or being opposed to dominant British values.

There are some understandable reasons for this. Much of the coverage, for example, is fed by domestic politics, as well as the foreign priorities of individual governments – UK journalists, for example, are invited by the Ministry of Defence to accompany soldiers on the front line, which inevitably means more airtime for war reports from Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of the coverage is fed by voter concerns over Islam and immigration. Some of it is being fed by prejudices inside newsrooms about People Who Don't Look Like Us. A decade or two ago such people would have been single mothers and the gay community. Today they are the Roma, East Europeans and Muslims.

In working with, or engaging with the media, the British Council needs to recognise the following:

First: the news media thrives on bad news, rather than good and prefers 'events' to processes, which are seen as tedious and off-putting for audiences. Audience research confirms that viewers and readers are more likely to watch and read shock-and-awe stories. The British Council is mostly in the news when there is a crisis, or controversy (real or perceived), as was the case, for example, with the organisation's presence in Russia or its new arts strategy. Positive developments do not make good stories, and are seen as being boring. The Muslim News Awards for Excellence, a glittering and high-profile event that rewards Muslim and non-Muslim high-achievers rarely gets any press (except when Tony Blair and Prince Charles attend as guests).

Second: with the exception of a handful of specialists, most general news reporters working on national newspapers do not have enough knowledge to communicate nuance and complexity. It is easier to reduce each issue to two extremes, which is often what happens in many of the topics covered in journalism. Moreover, journalists do not like being told what to do. This situation is made worse by the fact that there is little formal continuing professional development and no entry qualifications. 'Guidelines' on how to report better or more accurately have little or no impact. The same applies to media training courses, or study days in which experts come and provide briefings for journalists on complex topics. These are regarded mostly as 'spin' even by those attending such courses. In addition, journalists are also much busier now than they have ever been, as one reporter from Spain told us, meaning they have even less time to read background material.

The implications for Our Shared Europe are several: it is unrealistic to expect the news media to change in the short or medium term (if at all). Our Shared Europe needs to operate with the understanding that, at best, its activities will not be covered and, in the worse case that they are likely to be attacked. During some of the consultation visits, we heard several examples of how potentially 'positive' projects relating to Muslims were attacked in the press. In Paris, the Centre for Islamic Cultures was criticised in the right-wing media. In Cologne, a decision by the city's philharmonic orchestra to stage a world music concert at the end of Ramadan generated considerable press criticism and several audience members cancelled their subscriptions. In London, recent attempts to generate a more nuanced debate over Sharia have been met with considerable hostility.

However, there are several initiatives that Our Shared Europe can instigate in order to at least sow the seeds for a changed narrative. One of these is presenting evidence to senior media executives that unrelentingly negative news could be harmful for community relations, and may even be contributing to more young people becoming sympathetic to

extremism. Ditto, giving a voice to extremists, or those who support violent extremism. There are examples where such approaches have worked in the past. For instance, leading mental health researchers have been calling on the US media networks not to broadcast graphic images from school shooting incidents as they believe strongly that such images inspire copycat behaviour.

A second media initiative that Our Shared Europe could undertake is to organise cross-cultural exchanges and encounters in shared spaces. Journalists who use language such as 'Muslim extremists', or who see Muslims as being fixed and backward are sometimes often those who have little contact with people of different cultures. Once friendships begin to develop, it becomes harder to caricature people with whom you have good social relations – who might be your neighbours, or your children's friends.

‘There is more money in anti-radicalisation than there is in intercultural dialogue.’

Civil servant, Brussels

Our Shared Europe comes at a time when the ideas underlying multiculturalism in Europe are being rethought, both by government, commentators and independent experts. Among the reasons for this is the threat to national security from the violent behaviour of young men inspired by Al-Qaeda.

This is not the first (nor will it be the last) time that young men born and bred in a country engage in acts of treachery, or use violence in support of foreign causes. The Cambridge ring of spies passing British secrets to the Soviet Union during the Cold War were effectively home-grown terrorists as are those who today engage in acts of violence to achieve extremist goals in France, Germany and Spain.

The latest EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report from Europol¹⁴ shows that in 2007, France suffered 253 terror attacks from separatist organisations; Spain suffered 264. In the same period, there were four Islamist-related attacks (in Denmark, Germany and the UK). The head of UK intelligence has warned that there are 30 active terror plots in the UK and a further 3,000 young men have the potential to become terrorists.

There are many possible profiles of the would-be terrorist. One view is that a terrorism suspect is likely to be well-educated (probably in engineering or science), religious to an extent, reasonably well-integrated in society and susceptible to grooming by the leader of a terror cell.

A parallel view is that a much larger number of young, Muslim males are potentially susceptible to terrorism. Among the claimed evidence for this is that almost all of those who have been arrested or convicted have attended mosques of a particular Sunni sect and regularly read the Qur'an; some have been radicalised after visits to Muslim countries, particularly Pakistan. This theory makes the pool of suspects potentially in the hundreds of thousands in the UK, and in the hundreds of millions overseas.

Hundreds of millions of people are evidently not terrorists. None the less, in addition to pursuing the leaders and members of terror cells, the UK authorities are introducing a spectrum of anti-extremism projects that seek to engage with – or influence – the widest possible audience of Muslims.

Significant amounts of money have been made available for activities including: research councils training more PhDs and funding more research projects in Islam-related studies; the Foreign and Commonwealth Office funding visits to the UK from Islamic scholars from Muslim countries to preach messages of peace and tolerance; visits from UK Muslim professionals to member states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference; and the Department for Communities and Local Government funding young people's organisations that are considered moderate and progressive. In addition, every UK mosque is understood to be under some kind of surveillance from the intelligence community. And the Department for International Development is being asked to use its development networks to map potential links between Pakistanis in the UK and in Pakistan itself. Similar patterns can be observed in many other West European countries.

As often happens in situations when quick answers are needed to sensitive policy issues, governments release large amounts of money for research, advice and for pilot projects. Established institutions of knowledge and policy are often reluctant (or unable) to make use of these funds because they work to timescales of typically three or five years – and they do not believe that it is possible to provide rigorous advice or analysis in shorter timeframes. This reluctance opens the way for new experts who are willing to work to shorter deadlines and who include many from university-based institutions, private consulting firms and, more recently, former members of non-violent extremist groups. Many of these organisations are headed by influential people with good access to high-level networks.

What are the implications for Our Shared Europe?

There are several. The most important one is that in the world of European policy-making, any project that seeks to engage with young Muslims is likely to be evaluated by some policy-makers (and by some who are paid to advise policy-makers) for its potential in counter-terrorism. This was a concrete finding from the Our Shared Europe country consultations. At the same time, many (especially those from Muslim backgrounds) are already alert to the possibility that Our Shared Europe could be part of some hidden agenda – or a ‘civilising mission’ as one participant put it – that is not explicit in the project.

It cannot be overemphasised that Our Shared Europe needs to be kept as far as possible from activities that are linked to counter-terrorism or deradicalisation in any country. If this project is understood to have any such links (no matter how weak, or indirect), its aims of creating new and stronger bonds of trust will be damaged, perhaps irreparably.



Annexe 1: Proposed project activities

This annexe lists a range of possible projects that could contribute to the objectives of Our Shared Europe. It includes project activities suggested in the initial concept paper as a catalyst for discussions, as well as additional suggestions received during the consultation process. The activities are clustered in accordance with the three major outcomes Our Shared Europe aims to achieve.

1 Influence public debate and thinking about the Muslim contribution to European societies and identities

1a Our Shared Europe conference series

A series of major debates and conferences to be held in universities and cultural centres around Europe that would involve prominent European writers, scientists, philosophers, artists and historians. Entitled Our Shared Europe, these debates will be aimed at the educated public across Europe and will explore the shared Muslim-Judaeo-Christian and secular inheritance of Europe and what it means to be a Muslim in Europe today. These debates will also explore the present and future contribution – cultural, intellectual and scientific – that Muslims are making

and will make to European societies and will illuminate the different European Muslim histories and narratives that are found in Europe today. These debates will be linked to blogs and broadcast on radio and television.

Audience and partners

One hundred thousand next-generation influencers and innovators across Europe – particularly in the 18 to 40 age group, but also 5,000 policy-makers and thinkers and decision-makers in the current ‘authority’ generation. There will be a major emphasis on engaging ‘multipliers’ – people working in think tanks, the media, academia, education, politics, student associations and networks, as well as community leaders. There will also be a major effort to target young Muslims and those who are within the hinterland of far-right thinking in Europe. This is not just about reaching those who are sympathetic to thinking positively about the Muslim contribution to Europe; we have to reach both the passively tolerant and passively intolerant on both sides. Partners could include: universities, cultural centres, publishers, online companies and broadcasters in Europe.

1b Our Shared Europe awards scheme

This scheme will recognise significant contributions made by individuals in communities, businesses, schools and universities to fostering an increased awareness of a shared and diverse Europe through practical projects. It could be linked to a major Europe-wide awards ceremony broadcast across Europe. There are lessons to be learned from successful schemes that are partly analogous, such as The Muslim News Awards for Excellence.

Audience and partners

Businesses encouraged to partner disadvantaged communities and young people in the 16 to 40 age group in those communities motivated to get involved. Partners could include: businesses, local government and the media – both local and national.

1c International commission on the history of Muslims and Europe

Establishment of a commission comprising historians, policy-makers, representatives of the business world and members of civil society organisations from a broad range of countries and cultural backgrounds. Dedicated to the research of the history of Muslims and Europe, this commission would explore all aspects of the relationship by gathering evidence from literary review, expert workshops, public meetings and the internet in a continuing and transparent process. Its work will also be linked to the teaching of history in schools (see 3a).

Audience and partners

A network of 1,000 international experts, researchers, civil society activists, community representatives and policy-makers. Partners could include: universities, think tanks, foundations, government departments as well as non-governmental organisations and the media.

2 Change perceptions among a wider public about this contribution

2a Training programme for media professionals

Developing content and concepts for training events that provide journalists and broadcasters with a deeper understanding of the Muslim elements in European society, culture and history. Given that the media often reflect negative images about Muslims and only rarely cover the contribution Muslims have been and are making to Europe, this intervention aims to modify the way Muslims are depicted in the European media by updating the related knowledge of people working in the industry.

Audience and partners

One thousand media professionals throughout Europe with a focus on young professionals but also aiming to include influential representatives of the 'authority' generation. Partners could include: newspapers, broadcasting companies and other media players, professional organisations, trade unions, universities and media schools.

2b Media research

The initiation of a large-scale research study that assesses the impact on the perceptions of readers, listeners and viewers of media coverage of Islam and Muslims. Replicating similar studies in other areas of media coverage, this activity is mainly aimed at senior media executives and policy-makers who, depending on the results of the study, could initiate the policy changes required to influence the media narrative of Muslims. It should also feed into the training programme for media professionals suggested above (see 2a).

Audience and partners

Two hundred and fifty international senior media executives and policy-makers, as well as (indirectly) the wider public. Partners could include: universities, think tanks, newspapers, broadcasting companies and global market research consultancies.

2c Popularising Muslim contributions to Europe

Using radio, television and the internet as well as advertising and cinema to explore in a popular and accessible way the contribution made by Muslims to European civilisation, culture and identity over the last 1,400 years in the fields of science, art history, politics, architecture and philosophy. These would also explore the different narratives and traditions that lie behind contemporary European Islam and investigate what it means to be a Muslim in Europe today and the contribution that European Muslims are making to the future of their societies. These programmes would be linked to digital exhibitions that could be downloaded for use by libraries, universities, schools and youth clubs around Europe. It is important to acknowledge the work already done in this area, particularly by the BBC and Channel 4, and to consult widely on lessons learned here and elsewhere (e.g. the Festival of Muslim Cultures) in the preliminary phase.

Audience and partners

A wide cross-section of the European public. Target numbers would need to be defined in collaboration with partner organisations. Partners could include: advertising/PR companies, national and private sector broadcasters, businesses, universities and schools.

2d One-stop-shop online platform

This would be a single web-based space bringing together all available electronic resources on the cultural, scientific and intellectual contribution of Islam and Muslim communities to Europe – both in the past and in the present.

Audience and partners

Twenty-five million people, interested citizens and professionals. Partners could include: major multinational ICT corporations and international broadcasters as well as Muslim cultural websites.

2e Arts and creativity programme

In order to visualise the Muslim input to European culture and identity as well as to highlight the creative dimension of the past and present interaction between Europe and the Muslim world, Our Shared Europe should be accompanied by a range of suitable arts events. This could happen in various ways: existing productions that match the project theme could be brought together, for instance in a touring exhibition; or international artists and creative professionals working on related topics could be invited to develop new productions and works of art. In addition, workshops could be held in which young people from different cultural backgrounds, led by experienced international artists, could explore the relationship of Muslims and Europe in a creative way. Different formats for this strand of Our Shared Europe are currently being investigated.

Audience and partners

One hundred and fifty artists and creative professionals from Europe and beyond as well as 2,500 young people from different cultural (majority and minority) backgrounds, including their mentors, the international arts and creativity community and the wider public. Partners could include: foundations, museums and galleries, art schools, public funding bodies and sponsors from the business world.

3 Educate the next generation about the Muslim contribution to Europe and develop transcultural leadership skills

3a Building capacity in schools and education

This activity would begin with a review of schools' curricula in EU member states. If necessary, creating modules for use in schools across Europe that celebrate the shared roots of European societies and recognise the Muslim contribution to Europe's scientific, cultural and intellectual achievements. This will require working with local education authorities, national and regional ministries of education, academics, and head teachers and their organisations to develop this new approach.

Audience and partners

Every schoolchild in Europe. Partners could include: the European Commission, the Council of Europe, education ministries, local education authorities, teachers' organisations and universities and schools in all EU member states.

3b Transcultural leadership programme

This activity would include Our Shared Europe leadership courses aimed at developing a new generation of young leaders from Muslim as well as other minority and majority communities who understand the new dynamics of transcultural leadership – this would be aimed particularly at the next generation of education, media and community leaders, as well as future business and political leaders. This is cost-intensive, not only in terms of high-quality training, but also because of the follow-up activities that will maintain and augment the networks. The aim would be to ensure that this programme also reaches young leaders in disadvantaged communities across Europe.

Audience and partners

Ten thousand young, high potential/next-generation leaders, both from established and disadvantaged communities. Partners could include: foundations, e.g. LEAD – an international not-for-profit organisation with a network of 1,700 leaders in more than 80 countries (www.lead.org), businesses, city councils, schools and universities.

3c. Volunteer and educational exchanges

Using exchange activities on both school and higher education level to create or restore trust by enabling people from different cultural backgrounds to spend time together. This could be achieved by encouraging participation of young people from minority backgrounds in existing programmes, such as Connecting Classrooms or Erasmus, as well as by initiation of new activities if need be.

Audience and partners

See 3a and 3b.



Annexe 2: Experts and stakeholders involved in the consultation programme

The British Council would like to express its sincere gratitude for the valuable feedback, constructive criticism and encouragement provided by the individuals and institutions listed below as well as by all the others who contributed to the development of the Our Shared Europe project.

Belgium

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Hakim Benichou, Minderhedenforum

Jean-Luc Blanpain, Catholic Church

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Benoît Fontaine, King Baudouin Foundation

Zakaria Hamidi, De Nieuwe Horizon

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Gilles De Kerchove, European Council
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Farhad Golyardi, Eutopia
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Nazia Hussain, Open Society Institute
Ron Korver, European Commission
Karel Smouter, Mr Groen van Prinstererstichting
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Mohamed Nocair Lamriki, Shem's Publicite
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Guus Extra, Tilburg University

Gulden Ilmaz, journalist

Zoe Papaikonomou, journalist

Ewoud Poerink, Dutch Centre for Political Participation

Wim Klei, Radaradvies

Wasif Shadid, Tilburg University

Massimiliano Spotti, Tilburg University

Theo Veenkamp, former CEO of public sector bodies

Portugal

AbdoolKarim Vakil, Portuguese Islamic Community,
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Luis Ramon Altagracia, Nuevo Mundo

Elena Arigita, Casa Arabe-IEAM

José María González, Instituto Santamarca

Cherifa Ben Hassine, Centro Cultural Islámico

José Manuel Laureiro, Colegio Antonio Moreno Rosales

Fadhila Mammam, Servicio de Mediación Social
Intercultural (SEMSI)

Abdennur Prado, Junta Islamica Catalana

Monica Pratt, journalist

Kamal Rahmouni, Asociación de Trabajadores
Inmigrantes Marroquíes en España (ATIME)

Richard Youngs, Fundación par las Relaciones
Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE)

Switzerland

Tariq Ramadan, author and lecturer

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Canan Aritman, Member of Parliament

İshak Arslan, Marmara University

Aygen Aytaç, United Nations

İbrahim Bükel, Ministry of National Education

Burhaneddin Duran, Sakarya University

Elshad Iskandarov, Islamic Conference
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İbrahim Kalın, SETA Foundation for Political,
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Mustafa Ozel, Fatih University

Ali Murat Yel, Fatih University

Murat Yetkin, *Radikal*

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Amar Abbas, Youth Action

Amina Ahmed, Youth Community Support
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Ruhana Ali, London School of Economics
Students' Union

Anas Al-Shaikh Ali, Association of Muslim Social
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Nadeem Baksh, Institute of Community Cohesion

Anwari Din, Youth Community Support Agency
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Catherine Fieschi, Demos

Susan Handley, Local Government Association

Jenny Kartupelis, East of England Faiths Council

Elisabeth Kendall, Centre for the Advanced Study of
the Arab World, University of Edinburgh

Hammad Khan, British Board of Film Classification

Amjad Rashid, Blackburn with Darwen Training
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Ziauddin Sardar, City University London

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The Our Shared Europe project is the British Council's response to one of the major cultural challenges facing our continent today – the growing mutual mistrust between Muslim communities and wider European society. Our Shared Europe seeks to find common ground, and build shared values, perspectives and behaviours that are based on mutual respect and trust. In particular, it is about how to acknowledge the contribution of Islamic communities and cultures – both in the past but also in the present – to the shaping of contemporary European civilisation and society. This means recognising the rich and diverse roots of our culture and society and using this recognition to build a more inclusive view of the continent that we all share.

This report summarises the findings of an extensive consultation programme during which the Our Shared Europe idea was discussed with an international group of experts and stakeholders.

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About the author

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