

EUROPEAN MONITORING CENTRE ON RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA
OBSERVATOIRE EUROPÉEN DES PHÉNOMÈNES RACISTES ET XÉNOPHOBES
EUROPÄISCHE STELLE ZUR BEOBACHTUNG VON RASSISMUS UND FREMDENFEINDLICHKEIT



Anti-Islamic reactions in the EU
after the terrorist acts against the USA

A collection of country reports from RAXEN
National Focal Points (NFPs)

12th September to 31st December 2001

SWEDEN

EXPO Foundation

Following the terror attacks in the USA on 11th September the EUMC found that there was a pressing need to closely follow the possible negative repercussions on racial and xenophobic attitudes and events in civil societies in Europe. On the basis of national reports drafted by its RAXEN network of National Focal Points (NFPs), the EUMC produced a first short-term report on anti-Islamic reactions in all countries of the European Union on 9th October 2001.

In order to have a longer term and regular monitoring on attitudes/incidents towards Muslim/Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups, the EUMC decided to follow up the first report and continue to closely monitor the situation at least until the end of the year 2001.

It therefore asked the RAXEN NFPs to produce additional reports, monitoring the situation on a monthly basis until the end of the year; in addition, it asked for a final report analysing the overall developments from 11th September to 31st December 2001.

According to the EUMC request, the reports have addressed in particular the following issues:

- acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural or religious minorities (especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups or new types of victims), related to the recent terrorist attacks in the USA;
- good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence;
- reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends.

In addition to the summary report written on behalf of the EUMC by Prof. Nielsen and Mr. Allen of the University of Birmingham, the following pages contain the original reports submitted by each NFP for the whole period.

Not all reports have been made available from all countries, but the coverage is however complete. The reports are quite varying in size. It should be considered that the Member States have different systems in collecting data: some have implemented a rather elaborated and comprehensive approach, while others have done what they could to get information about the situation in the Member State.

The task of the RAXEN network is to collect reliable and comparable data (including examples of and models for “good practices”) at the European level on the phenomena of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in order to help the EU and its Member States to take measures or formulate courses of action. For further information please visit the EUMC homepage <http://eumc.eu.int>

Vienna, 23 May 2002

First short-term report

Verbal and physical attacks

Similar to other countries, there have been some violent incidents relating to the WTC bombing.

- In Mölndal, Gothenburg, a Iranian born taxi driver was assaulted and beaten up by people who called him a »bloody terrorist«; this happened within 24 hours of the bombing.
- In Södertälje, south of Stockholm, a restaurant owned by a Syrian immigrant who has lived in Sweden for close to 25 years, was subjected to night-time vandalism. Windows were smashed and graffiti spray painted on the facade: »Arab terrorist« and a swastika.

The police claim »Nazis were behind the vandalism«; however, if so, it is unlikely to have been in an organised form since the Nazi groups have more or less come out in support of the bombing.

Also cause for concern is the fact that some schools have reported incidents, suggesting pupils with Islamic background have clashed with Swedish (or possibly non-Islamic immigrants in one case). However, these incidents have been few and isolated.

There has certainly been an increase in verbal abuse of Arab immigrants or people of the Islamic faith. Internet seem to be a focal point for organised anti-Islamic sentiments, where various »chat pages« such as the *Exile Passage*, has been filled with hundreds of statements of the shot-them-all-and-let-God-sort-them-out-type. Here, xenophobia, including both anti-Semitic and anti-Arabic hatred is undisguised.

Attitudes

1. Established political parties and Media responses to the terrorist outrages

Sweden does not differ from other European countries in reaction to the WTC outrage. Most mainstream political parties have condemned the attacks and urged support to the American people. Several leading politicians, among whom the Prime Minister Göran Persson, have focused on the dangers of fostering anti-Arab racism as a result of the outrage.

Among immigrant and Islamic organisations in Sweden, there is widespread concern that the »anti-terrorist stand will foster broader anti-Arab or anti-Islamic sentiments. There has been criticism of television reporting from the Middle East, which showed Palestinians cheering the WTC attack. According to critics, such behaviour is not representative of the Palestinian people as a whole, and that when such pictures are shown over and over again, it will eventually lead to people identifying Palestinians as »pro-terrorists«.

Another story in a mainstream daily, focused on mapping out Usama Bin Laden's »connections in Sweden«. The story claim that Swedish Islamic organisations have done fundraisings for the Bin Laden network, although the documentation to the story was at best, »quite shaky«.

Mr Kurdo Baksi, a journalist and well known immigrant profile, say he believe that for the time being the WTC bombing has not led to a dramatic increase in anti-Arab or anti-Islamic

sentiments in Sweden (more than what is »normal«). However, Mr Baksi adds, while there is no immediate danger of broad racism specifically due to the WTC bombing, this may change down the road. The crucial point is how media and responsible politicians responds to the issue in the near future. "I think it is still too early to draw any definite conclusions, although I am seriously concerned about what will be the effects one month or half a year ahead", Mr Baksi says.

2. Extreme right responses to the terrorist outrages

The Swedish extreme right, broadly divided into (a) »neo-Nazi organisations« and (b) »suit & tie fascists«. Both sides are using the WTC attacks in their propaganda, although in completely different ways.

(a) The openly anti-semitic National Socialist Front (NSF) published a leading text which says that the (Swedish) authorities claim that the WTC attack was an »attack on democracy«, and concludes: »If so, it is a vengeance for all the lives Democracy has claimed.«

A conclusion is that to National Socialists, traditional anti-Semitism remains the stronger focal point which eclipses the anti-Arab sentiments.

(b) Contrary to the Nazi scene, the pseudo-respectable Sweden Democrats (SD), which is basically a racist and anti-immigration campaign party, has come out in uncharacteristic »support of Israel« in favour of fostering anti-Arab and anti-Moslim sentiments in Sweden.

19th September 2001

Report on anti-Islamic and anti-Arabic reactions **after the terrorist acts in the USA –** **Reactions from 25th September to 19th October**

The picture emerging in Sweden currently seems to be one of contradiction. While extremist parties in their propaganda have worked hard to add fuel to anti-Moslim sentiments, and while there has been an increase in the number of islamophobic incidents, incident reporting by the authorities suggest that the situation is far from the worst case scenario expected immediately after the September 11 World Trade Center bombing. At the same time representatives of the Moslim community in Sweden are reporting an increased fear and insecurity among its members.

POLICE INCIDENT REPORTING

There are certain problems in obtaining exact figures for anti-Islamic or anti-Arab incidents. Statistics on racial violence is annually compiled by the constitutional protection branch of the **Swedish Security Police (Säkerhetspolisen, Säpo)**. However, for ongoing investigations, cases are filed at the **Criminal Intelligence Service (Kriminalunderrättelsetjänsten, KUT)**, a division of the National Police Authority. The KUT is unable to quote exact figures due to the fact that all incidents relating to September 11 are gathered in the same computer file; this includes anti-American and anti-Semitic incidents as well as anti-Arab incidents. In addition, the case file includes alarms to the police which

later turned out to be erroneous or mistaken, or cases where the investigation has proved inconclusive.

Police Officer Mr Thord Modin, attached to the Analysis Unit of the KUT, say the days following September 11 saw an increase of reported incidents. He estimates that there has been a daily 5-10 cases reported, with a peak on September 14, when 18 incidents were reported. However, these cases includes both anti-American, anti-Jewish and anti-Arab incidents.

– Off hand I would say there is a rather equal distribution of anti-American and anti-Arab incidents, with possibly a slight lead for anti-American incidents, Mr Modin says.

– Don't misunderstand me, but this can be interpreted as a good and positive development. Following September 11 we feared the worst. When two sky-scrapers are attacked and some 5 000 people killed, and Arabs generally identified as the »bad guys«, you could expect a far stronger reaction from extremists. As it is, the reaction has not been anything close to what we expected, and this may suggest that the Swedish people are not anti-Arab or prone to listen to anti-Arab propaganda.

Mr Modin's estimate would put the number of reported anti-Moslim incidents somewhere in the region of 200-plus cases following September 11.

MOSLIM COMMUNITY REACTIONS

Mr Mostafa Kharraki, head of the **Swedish Moslim Council**, doesn't entirely share the police assessment. Although there hasn't been any massive outbreak of anti-Arab or Islamophobia, members of the Moslim community are reporting a distinct change in daily lifestyle.

When the September 11 attack took place, a new mosque has recently opened in the heart of the Stockholm south-side district. For several years places of worship for Stockholm's Moslims had been temporary places located in basements or backstreet warehouses. Due to the growth of the Moslim population, demands for a permanent and serious place of worship were raised, and in the early 1990s it was suggested that an abandoned electricity plant in the heart of Stockholm would be rebuilt to house a permanent congregation.

This decision initiated a massive racist campaign trying to generate popular support against the building of a mosque in Stockholm. Various leaflets and handbills spread in the neighbourhood claimed the mosque would become a »terrorist centre«, and that this was only the first step in a Moslim masterplan to gain control of the city centre. The campaign was never successful, although there were several small rallies against the mosque.

– Since the mosque recently opened we have had a steady stream of visitors, not the least from the local population on Stockholm south-side, Mr Kharraki explains. This summer we had almost daily visitors, either by individuals or groups, and there was a very positive feeling that we were building a close relationship with people in the neighbourhood. In this we also had the support of the nearby St Chaterine's Church, which is one of Stockholms largest Christian churches.

– Following the September attack, the number of visitors to the mosque dropped to almost zero, and still two months after World Trade Center the situation remains the same.

– Although the situation has been very calm, there is no doubt that members of the Moslim community feel more insecure and uncertain about the future.

Mr Kharraki says several members of the community have reported incidents or voiced concern.

– For instance, a Moslim woman who works in a children's day care centre is opening or closing the center once a week. She has always walked back and forth to her workplace. Since September she feel so insecure that her husband now must follow her to her job.

The Moslim council also reports a marked increase in telephone hate calls or hate mail arriving to the mosque offices or to individual moslms. Sample quotes:

---Item: *»We don't want justice. We demand revenge. We want them (the moslms) all dead.«*

---Item: One letter contain a picture of Usama bin Laden with the text: *»OUR ENEMY – KILL ALL MOSLIMS«*.

---Item: *»We would like an enormous blood bath in the Middle East. All moslms are responsible. They are no humans. Smash terrorism. Smash Islam. Smash the Arabs.«*

---Item: *»I will hate the Moslms as long as I live. I will teach my children to do the same. Why do you live in our Christian nation!«*

---Item: *»Damned moslim. We really hate you all. Death to all bloody Moslms.«*

– Although there has not been any massive repression against moslms in general, there has been a string of incidents, and of course hate mail and telephone terror to individuals increase the fear and insecurity among our members, Mr Kharraki claims.

Mr Pierre Durrani, head of the **Moslim Council Youth Organisation**, issued a forceful statement condemning the WTC attack. *»Terrorism is a crime against God and his supreme creation, mankind«*.

NOTABLE ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS

As with other institutions, the Moslim Council does not compile any independent systematic incident reporting. Mr Kharraki says that he bases his claims on telephone calls or visits from individual moslms.

At the same time the police incident reporting is not reliable, because it only shows cases actually reported to the KUT Analysis Unit from various police districts. From previous experience we know that such reporting is anything but complete for the simple reason that many cases of racial crimes may be reported as, for instance, *»plain robbery«* or *»assault«*, but with no specific reference to it being racially motivated. We can also expect that some of the cases reported on closer inspection will prove to be false alarm etc. A final compilation will only be presented in the Security Police annual report next year.

With this in mind, we can state that appx. 200 cases have been reported to the police and that additional cases – hate mail or telephone terror – have been noted by the Moslim congregation but (with few exceptions) not reported to the police.

Several of the cases reported are of minor nature – insults, cases of graffiti vandalism with a racial slant etc. Some of the cases are of more serious nature and have made media headlines.

(+) In Märsta, north Stockholm, a local mosque was targeted by arson, when a fire was started by the entrance of the building. The fire was discovered by a local shop owner, and was put out before any substantial damage was made.

(+) The Intercultural School in Stockholm, with predominantly Moslim students, was targeted in a firebombing when a bottle was thrown through a window and set fire to a carpet. The fire died out by itself and was discovered as student arrived in the morning.

(+) In Södertälje, south of Stockholm, a 27-year-old Moslim woman has been targeted by several attacks by a racist youth gang. The harassment began following September 11, and has included both verbal and physical abuse. As violence escalated she was hit by a stone and eventually reported the incident to the police.

(+) In a much publicised incident, three men of Arabic origin on their way to a week's vacation in Spain, were ordered to leave the air craft shortly before take off. The Captain on board refused to fly the three men. The airline company, Premair, claim the three men acted »strangely« and »nervously«, which frightened other passengers. The three men all claim they had a week vacation and opted for a last minute flight to Spain; they boarded the aircraft and didn't even notice anything strange until the captain turned up with airport security:
– I am shocked, say **Mr Ismail Fouda**, one of the three. It is obvious that were given a special treatment only because we all have Arabic names.
The case has been reported to the Discrimination Ombudsman.

(+) The Moslim council has reported an incident where a member of the congregation on his way to his work was suddenly picked by the police at a bus stop for, as he told the story, »no valid reason at all«. Brought to a nearby police station, he was informed that he was a suspect in bank robbery. Protesting his innocence, he was kept in a cell while police raided his apartment with drawn handguns, which took the wife of the suspect by surprise and scared her. The man was later released without apology or explanation. (Please note – this story is based on information from the Moslim Council, but is unconfirmed by police sources.)

ACTIVITIES TO COUNTER ISLAMOPHOBIA

Several activities to counter anti-Islamic tendencies have been carried out.

In a statement, the **Swedish Christian Council (Sveriges Kristna Rad)** has urged people to »do everything possible« to prevent racial harassment and threats in the wake of the World Trade Center bombing«. The Christian council is working closely with the Moslim Council.

The Christian Council, as well as several other Christian organisations, has severely criticised **Reverend Stanley Sjöberg**, a priest in an independent congregation, which launched a frontal assault on Islam at the end of September. In an article, Reverend Sjöberg claimed

»Islam has declared war on the Western World«. The article, was full of islamophobic sentiments.

Ms Yvonne Ruwaida, a Green Party member of parliament, took the initiative to launch a **Swedish Committee Against Islamophobia (SCAI)**. She was joined by **Mr Kurdo Baksi**, a well-known Kurdish author and journalist in Sweden. The SCAI board is made up of, among others, **Mr Pär-Axel Sahlberg**, a priest and Social Democratic member of parliament, **Mr Jan Hjärpe**, a professor of Islamology, **Ms Ann-Sofie Roald**, a Dr. of History, and other prominent individuals. The Committee is non-partisan.

Several prominent politicians, among them Minister of Integration **Ms Mona Sahlin** and Deputy Prime Minister **Ms Lena Hjelm-Wallén**, both from the Social Democratic Party, have visited the Stockholm mosque. Other politicians which have made high profile statements against islamophobia is **Mr Alf Svensson**, leader of the Christian Democratic Party, **Mr Lars Leijonborg**, leader of the Liberal Party, and **Mr Matz Hammarström**, a spokesman for the Green Party.

In a separate statement, prime minister **Göran Persson** has condemned any tendencies of islamophobia in Sweden, stating »there is no link between ordinary Swedish Moslims and the terrorists operation in the New York attack«.

EXTREME RIGHT PROPAGANDA

Immediately following the September 11 attacks, a division could be seen among extremist groups in Sweden. Explicitly Neo-Nazi organisations such as the National Socialist Front and others, voiced support for Usama Bin Lades and celebrated the attacks, while the so called »respectable racists« from parties such as the Sweden Democrats have taken every opportunity to incite anti-Arab and Islamophobic sentiments.

Sweden Democrat internet propaganda, as well as propaganda disseminated through various »non-political« chat pages, claim the Christian World is under attack by »Moslim invasion«.

The Sweden Democrat homepage quoted Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, claiming:

»We must be aware that our civilisation is superior and that our value system guarantees respect for human rights. Such respect does not exist in the Islamic countries.«

Sweden Democrat propaganda claim dozens of »Moslim terrorist organisations« are active in Sweden – most of the organisations referred to are ordinary immigrant organisations. In a text bordering on silliness, the Sweden Democrats claim Swedish prime minister Göran Persson »helped finance« the WTC attack. The argument is that by giving financial aid to immigrant organisations in Sweden, money will end up in terrorist bank accounts.

**SUMMARY REPORT on anti-Islamic
and anti-Arabic reactions after the terrorist acts in the USA
12th September – 31st December 2001**

Anti-Islamic and Anti-Arab sentiments in the wake of the World Trade Center bombings – January 2002

Anti-Islamic sentiments directly related to the September 11 terrorist attack on WTC in New York, seem to be peering out. However, other incidents cause concern among Swedish Moslims.

POLICE INCIDENT REPORTING

Following the September 11 terrorist attacks, the **Criminal Intelligence Service (Kriminalunderrättelsetjänsten, KUT)**, a division of the National Police Authority, decided to launch a task force to specifically monitor hate crimes related to the incident. In September last year the KUT expected a sharp increase in anti-islamic incidents; however this fear has not materialised in the way that was expected. According to KUT, the number of reported incidents was far less than expected. In January 2002 the task force was disbanded due to the low number of reported incidents.

KUT incident reporting includes all form of unlawful political act, mixing anti-Islamic, anti-American and anti-Jewish incidents, and includes everything from reported hate mail to physical attacks.

The period immediately following September 11 was marked by a number of incidents, some of which were violent and included assaults, one case of arson and much verbal abuse or harassment against moslims. Already one month after the event the level was down to 5-10 incidents daily, appx. half of which were defined as »anti-Islamic«. A number of these cases were in the form of incitement of racial hatred, letters or telephone threats.

By January 2002 the number of incidents that can be directly attributed to the September 11 attack were down to almost nil - thus the decision to disband the special task force. Race hate crimes currently reported follow the pre-September 11 pattern of »ususal« racist or islamophobic sentiments.

One type of incident related to September 11, which has continued in a few cases, is the »Anthrax Scare« - anonymous letters with white powder sent to various recipients. All reported cases have been false alarm and no such letter have actually contained any potentially lethal substance.

The conclusion of the KUT is that the September 11 attack has not spurred large anti-islamic sentiments among the Swedish population, which in its turn is considered an encouraging sign that Swedes in general are able to distinguish between isolated political terrorists and the larger Moslim population.

MOSLIM COMMUNITY REACTIONS

Muslim community spokesmen don't entirely share the police assessment. Although they agree there hasn't been any massive outbreak of anti-Arab racism or Islamophobia, members of the Muslim community are reporting a lingering change in daily lifestyle.

Muslim organisations, including the **Swedish Muslim Council** based in Stockholm, say they continue to receive hate letters, and that many members feel that they are in a vulnerable position both as individuals and as a group.

NOTABLE ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS

Much media and political attention have been focused on the situation concerning three Muslims of Somali origin living in Sweden for many years. Three months ago they were named on a U.S. State Department list of possible **Usama Bin Laden/Al Qaeda** collaborators. The treatment of the three Muslims has developed into a political embarrassment for the government.

The reasons for including the trio on the State Department list are unclear, but media leaks claim Washington suspects they may be involved in money laundering or financial support for Usama Bin Laden. The reason is that all three have sent money to relatives in Somalia through the well known »barefoot bank« al-Barakaat, based in Dubai. While there seem to be little doubt that Bin Laden may have been using al-Barakaat to some extent, so has a very large number of people with no relation to Al Qaeda.

While the three persons all deny any involvement with Bin Laden or Al Qaeda, the U.S. list immediately transformed them into suspected terrorists. Agreeing with the United Nations resolution freezing bank accounts for, and banning financial transactions with suspected terrorists, the Swedish government complied. For three months, they have not been able to touch their personal bank accounts, nor have they received salaries from their workplaces, or been able to get personal loans or even opening accounts in Swedish banks where relatives or friends would be able to lend personal financial support to pay daily bills and rents. As a result of this the three families have gone bankrupt, are unable to pay rent or mortgages, indeed, unable even to buy food for their daily need. What is more - the law is prohibiting other individuals to lend financial support to terrorist suspects and social security authorities will not accept them as people in need of support - until they are either cleared of suspicions or charged with criminal activities.

However, although the three suspects are protesting their innocence, they are unable to prove that they are so. One reason is they neither they, nor their lawyers, have been allowed access to any documentation substantiating the U.S. claim.

In early December a report from the Swedish Security Police (SÄPO), which *has* viewed the American documentation, claimed that there is nothing in the evidence presented that would stand up in a court of law or even lead to prosecution. Still, several weeks later the trio is still caught in a Catch 22 situation where they are unable to reach their own money, and while friends and relatives are prohibited from lending them money.

This situation has become increasingly embarrassing for the Swedish Social Democratic government. For one, one of the suspects is not only a member of the Social Democratic

Party - he is a prominent party parliamentary candidate in the upcoming general election. The situation thus borders on the absurd - should he become a member of parliament he would become part of Social Democrat parliamentary group, at the same as the Social Democratic government is treating him as a terrorist suspect.

The case has gained national headlines and has become a very hot issue. Several respectable human rights groups are protesting the treatment which, they claim, is treathening the very heart of the justice system in a democracy. A common sentiment seem to be that the government should either file charges against the suspect, or else defy the U.S. embargo on suspected terrorists. Several people participating in the debate claim the situation would never had been allowed this far, had the suspects not been Arabs and Moslims.

In mid-January the situation sharpened again, following an initiative by TV talk show host **Mr Robert Aschberg** and journalist **Mr Jan Guillou**, to openly defy the embargo by donating private funds to the families of the three suspects. They have thus committed a crime against the Swedish law. Racist organisations have not been slow to react; the Islamophobic extreme right party Sweden Democrats immediately made a complaint to the police against Mr Aschberg and Mr Guillou.

Lawyer **Mr Leif Silbersky**, who represents the suspects, say he believe that the treatment of the suspects is an insult to any democratic justice system.

RELATED ANTI-ISLAMIC INCIDENTS

While anti-islamic sentiments related directly to September 11 seem to have petered out, another incident has caused extreme concern among the Moslim community.

I Janury 2002 **Ms Fadime Sahindal**, an outspoken 26-year-old Kurdish woman was brutally murdered by several gunshots to her head. Her killer was her father, **Mr Rahmi Sahindal**. His reason was »to defend the honor of the family name«, making the murder of Fadime the second well known so called »honorary killing« in Sweden in five years.

When she was murdered, Fadime Sahindal had been on the run from her family for several years, following her refusal to marry a older man selected by the family, and due to her involvement with a young Swedish boy. Fadime's father branded her a »whore«, claiming her death was the only solution to the shame she had brought on her family.

The Fadime murder has caused massive protests in the whole of Sweden, with thousands of Swedes - men and women - meeting for rallies and memorials in public places and churches. While most such demonstrations have been spurred by the great injustice done to Fadime, protesting a value system which is based on sexism and an obvious oppression of womens rights, some of the sentiments have also been directed towards Moslim belief in general and the Kurdish community in particular.

A spokesman for the **Kurdish National Association (Kurdiska Riksförbundet)** in Stockholm say the Association recieved close to 500 telephone calls in the day after the murder:

A majority were made by uninformed callers that believed the practice of »honorary killings« are inherent in the Islamic beilef or that it is endorsed by the Kurdish community in general. Other calls were openly islamophobic or linking the murder to immigration and immigrants in general.

Mr Kurdo Baksi, whose family attempted to aid Fadime Sahindal in the years before the murder, fear that any such high profile incident will inevitable become fuel to anti-Kurdish or anti-Islamic sentiments.

EXTREME RIGHT PROPAGANDA

Immediately following the September 11 attacks, a division could be seen among extremist groups in Sweden. Explicitly Neo-Nazi organisations such as the **National Socialist Front** and others, voiced support for Usama Bin Lades and celebrated the attacks, while the so called »respectable racists« from parties such as the **Sweden Democrats** have taken the opportunity to incite anti-Arab and Islamophobic sentiments.

Anti-Islamic extreme right propaganda has continued unabated, mainly on the Internet, although there are less and less references to September 11. The current propaganda seem to focus on »ordinary« run of the mill anti-foreigner propaganda.