

A LOCAL GOVERNMENT PLAN TO PROMOTE THE INTEGRATION OF MUSLIMS AND MUTUAL RESPECT BETWEEN COMMUNITIES.

Presented by:

Johannes # Germany # The Scenario

Lucas # France # Economics, Politics, Civil life

Martti # Finland # Cultural, Religious, Social issues

Samuel # Switzerland # Education





Scenario

- In the project "A local government plan to promote the integration of Muslims and mutual respect between communities" a scenario was given to the members of the project group in order to structure the. It was moderated by Terry Wynn, a former MEP, who also gave the scenario. In it, the project group is an elected member of a city or regional council. The region is doing well economically, but has been losing population to the capital region, resulting in a shortage of labor. As the resulting need for labor could not be satisfied regionally, immigrants have come. The majority of them are Muslims.

- 
- The national government has passed a law asking the City Council to "promote the integration of minorities and to encourage mutual respect among communities". The national government is committed to funding any projects the City Council initiates. The Council has identified the following five project areas: economic, political, social, cultural/religious, and education. Last but not least, the council member the project group is representing is a Christian.

- 
- 
- The Muslim minority in our City can be described as follows: In their culture, men are the sole decision makers. The men speak the local language (their wives do not) and are the contact persons for the city council. Children visit local schools. It is a relatively homogeneous community in which most of the women wear scarfs, but only 5% are devout.

- 
- Islam is defined as submission to the will of Allah, and also a way of life which goes far beyond traditional definitions of religion.
 - In the region, this minority represents about 60% of pupils in school and 25% - 30% of the total population.
- 

- 
- 
- The projects that follow are the result of an intense discussion during the three project group sessions. Group members represented two different perspectives: the situation of Muslims in the Balkans, on the one hand, and on the other hand, Western Europe. The project outcome which is shown here focuses on a recent immigration population to Western Europe.



Economy

- The group discussed the economic barriers to integration in terms of a specific example: traditional banking, with its interest rates, is a substantive barrier to the integration of Muslim immigrants into our community's economic life. It is our understanding that banks in Muslim countries buy a house and then rent it to the (buyer) for a set period of time, and then make a gift of the house at the end of that period. We, as a council, will lobby for changes to tax law which currently presents a barrier to this Muslim-friendly procedure.



Politics

- On the political side, we would act as individual members of different political parties to actively recruit members of the immigrant population into our parties. We would discourage, but certainly not forbid, the creation of a Muslim political party.



Social, Cultural and Religious Considerations

- Regarding the social, religious and cultural issues, the biggest problem is that as people know very little about the Muslim people, they've grown afraid of the Muslim culture and religion.
- 

- 
- In order to correct this and achieve communication and mutual respect between the two major ethnic groups we have decided to take the following actions: Extra financing will be made available for different kind of hobby groups and activities, such as soccer, chess or knitting clubs, if they consist of multicultural participants. The goal is to fund a broad selection of activities so that everybody, regardless of their gender and personal interest has a possibility to meet members of the other culture in within a social activity pleasant for them.

- 
- 
- We also plan to promote and fund different multicultural events including cultural conferences around holidays of both cultures and multicultural movie festivals, in order to stimulate mutual respect, interest and relationships across socio-cultural-religious boundaries.

Education

- The group defined the current educational environment as relatively homogenous, with all state schools being non-confessional, or, secular.

Muslim parents have voiced their concerns about the wide spread of pornography at secular state schools. Another concern mentioned was boozing and drugs. Therefore representatives of the Muslim community have asked the town council to consider the funding of Muslim-only schools. As members of the town councils we understand the concerns of the Muslim minority and want to treat their concerns with seriousness though we don't want to encourage the building of a Muslim school, which would serve to create a wall of division between communities. We hope that the schools could actually serve as a bridge!

- 
- As a compromise we suggest the following measures: optional single sex schools, open to all; banning and fining the use and distribution of any kind of pornography at school; regular meetings between local teachers and (particularly) parents of the Muslim pupils to foster relationship and understanding of the cultural needs for the teachers; and freedom for pupils to wear religious symbols (i.e. scarfs) at school .

- 
- We will institute language and culture prep courses for immigrant children of all ages before entering public schools. Additionally, language, culture and civil society courses for immigrant parents which will be held in order to inform the immigrants about their rights and responsibilities in our society, and to give them the tools to integrate successfully. The courses will be single-sex in order to create an environment appropriate to the cultural needs of the immigrant population. Women will have the opportunity to attend such courses during the school day at their children's schools, modelled upon successful programs in the Frankfurt region. The school curriculum will be expanded to include non-confessional, inter-religious instruction in order to foster understanding between the communities.



Conclusion

- On behalf of the „Integration" group, we thank the European Student Forum, the European Evangelical Alliance, the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students and the European Union for the opportunity to meet together and investigate these questions together.



Project prepared by:

- Aron # Hungary
- Samuel # Switzerland
- Ave # Estonia
- Paulina # Poland
- Lucas # France
- Valentino # Yugoslavia
- Zsuzsa # Hungary
- Johannes # Germany
- Aleksandra # Macedonia
- Martti # Finland
- Gerta # Albania