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The Cartoon Crisis Revisited: A Danish Perspective

Tim Jensen *

Theme: This ARI looks at the lessons to be learnt from the Danish cartoon crisis and the limits to freedom of expression in Denmark.

Summary: The analysis that follows does not present a series of strategic plans to help solve all the problems related to the cartoon crisis as it ignited in Denmark and spread elsewhere. It simply attempts to shed a little more light on aspects of the specific Danish context as well as on the handling of the crisis. It outlines a number of fundamental issues and discusses the international context and mentions some lessons that it is hoped have now been learnt.

Analysis: On March 15 2006 Denmark's Director of Public Prosecutions announced his decision not to institute criminal proceedings against *Jyllands-Posten* for its article 'The Face of Muhammad', published on 30 September 2005.¹ Neither the cartoons nor the text accompanying them, he argued, violate sections 140 and 266b of the Criminal Code aimed at protecting religious feelings against mockery and scorn. 'The face of Muhammad', legally speaking, was neither blasphemous nor discriminatory.

One of his arguments was that *Jyllands-Posten* did not intend to provoke for the sake of provocation but to prompt a public debate on freedom of expression in regard to religion and religious feelings. Besides, the Director found reason to look into what is 'generally considered accepted usage or other form of expression in Denmark', and he noted that 'a direct and informal form of debate is not unusual in Denmark'.

For reasons later to be mentioned, I have my doubts as to the wisdom of the decision and the validity of the arguments. But it is beyond doubt that 'The Face of Muhammad' did raise a debate in Denmark and around the world. And it did so partly because quite a few Muslims in Denmark and around the globe actually did feel they had been provoked, did feel offended and did think that the 'The Face of Muhammad' was part of a defamatory and discriminatory campaign directed exclusively against Islam and Muslims.

Quite a few non-Muslims think so too. And the UN also seems to think so. On 24 November 2005, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance asked the Danish government to answer some questions in regard to the cartoons. Despite the substantial reply dated 23 January 2006, in a report of 13 February² the Special Rapporteur found the cartoon issue one of the most severe examples of hatred for Islam, adding that the Danish government

* General Secretary of IAHR –The International Association for The History of Religions– and Head of the department of The Study of Religions, University of Southern Denmark

¹ The decision is available in English at <http://www.rigsadvokaten.dk/>.

² Report E/CN.4/2006/17, available at http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?m=92

in its initial handling of the matter revealed 'the trivialisation of Islamophobia at the political level'.

Severe criticism of the handling of the crisis by the Danish government, not least the Prime Minister, does not come only from Muslims, the political opposition and the UN. True, one of the leaders of the opposition, Marianne Jelved, attacked the Prime Minister head on, calling him 'dangerous' and a risk to national security, due to the alliance with the neo-nationalist Danish People's Party, his arrogant refusal to listen to criticism and a dangerous black-and-white view as to who are friends and foes. An equally severe criticism came from leading businessmen, normally close friends of the right-wing government, as they linked the crisis to failed integration, a failure partly due to the Islamophobic and discriminatory discourse and policy of both the government and its parliamentary base, the Danish People's Party. But, naturally, the government and the Prime Minister also have supporters, and so does *Jyllands-Posten*, in Denmark and elsewhere. Examples are legion.³

In any case, the violent demonstrations, the burning of embassies and the boycott of Danish goods have come to an end. Politicians, diplomats, pundits and journalists in Denmark and around the world are slowly recovering from the 'nightmarish' weeks of late January and early February when the crisis ran amuck. Though 'nightmarish', the cartoon crisis was not a nightmare, it was real. Probably the most serious political crisis in Danish history since World War II.

It will not change the world, discourses and realpolitik, as did 9/11. But it has already made history and it is beyond doubt that it was but the tip of the iceberg, a symptom of severe problems and conflicts, in Denmark, Europe, the Muslim world and in international relations.

The debate continues and it is greatly to be hoped that the crisis becomes a lesson for the future, or even better, a turning point. Processes of integration, in Denmark and other EU countries, as well as international cooperation and co-existence, depend on balanced analyses and strategies, creative thinking and a will to act accordingly.

The urge for this has also been stressed by recent statements from Osama bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and Mohammad Hassan. For instance, bin-Laden condemns the cartoons as one more sign of what he speaks of as the Western crusade against Islam, calling for an extended boycott of European and US goods as well as for a continued war against the 'crusaders'. Hassan, in more direct terms, encourages terrorist attacks on Denmark, Norway and France. These are no doubt strategic moves to profit from the widespread opposition to the Muhammad cartoons even among moderate Muslims, who do not normally share these extremist points of view. The spreading of the latter, however, has been fuelled by the publication of the 'Face of Muhammed'.

Offending many more than militant extremists, and buying into the anti-Muslim discourse and that of the clash of civilisations, it helped make the extremist rhetoric on Western hostility and the 'Crusade' against Islam and Muslims more plausible. Almost at the same time as the audiotape by bin-Laden appeared on al-Jazeera on 23 April, the Danish Ministry of Foreign affairs released a report concluding that the Middle East will be a problem for many years and that it will not go away, not least because of the widespread opposition to what is conceived as Western cultural imperialism and colonisation.

³ An unofficial weblog illustrate this: <http://bibelen.blogspot.com/>.

Bin Laden (and Bush) may be exceptional in terms of explicit dualistic rhetoric, and Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisation' theoretically flawed: thinking and acting in terms of an existing or possible clash of civilisations is no longer limited to a minority of Muslim and anti-Muslim extremists. Events, rhetoric, and various agents are doing their best to make the thesis a fact, using rhetoric to legitimise various violent or non-violent agendas.

One of the main challenges, of course, is to counter the rhetoric of the clash of civilisations and to disarm the proponents of good arguments in favour of it. This, however, is anything but easy. The discourse is powerful and pervasive. During a recent meeting on 3 April with his Spanish colleague, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs mentioned the risk of Huntington's clash-of-civilisations scenario becoming a reality, though he stressed that he hoped concerted efforts, such as the Barcelona process and the 'Partnership for Progress and Reform' would help to prevent it, transforming a clash of civilisations into an 'Alliance of Civilisations'.⁴

It is, of course, nice to know that the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is aware that there is more to the cartoon crisis than some Danish imams who travelled to the Middle East to raise support for their protests. Still, it is problematic if it accepts the pretext for the publication of the cartoons, a pretext which itself accepts the Muslim and anti-Muslim extremist discourses on a Western crusade and a clash of civilisations.

As argued by Riordan,⁵ the 'Alliance of Civilisations', as presented in the statement mentioned above and elsewhere, may very well be bound to fail, based as it is upon the very constructs it sets out to deconstruct, and because the partners of the alliance are the 'good guys', ie, those among the 'other' who are already our friends as well as foes of our 'real' foes. The same criticism can probably also be directed towards the Danish 'Arabic Initiative' and most of the other dialogue meetings that have been arranged.

In what follows I do not present a series of strategic plans to help solve all the problems related to the cartoon crisis as it took fire in Denmark and elsewhere. I simply want to shed a little more light on aspects of the specific Danish context as well as on the handling of the crisis. Before doing so, however, I find it necessary to mention a few fundamental issues and say a few words about the international contexts. Along the way, I shall mention some lessons that I hope have been learnt.

One of the first lessons is that the crisis was (and is) multifaceted. Causes, conditions and contexts are many, and it is a serious mistake to look for only one reason or to think that it is an easy task to tell the 'bad guys' from the 'good guys'. It is not a question of 'either-or' but of 'both-and', whether you talk of respect for religion and freedom of expression or other aspects of the crisis. This lesson follows from sound reasoning and the factual complexity of the world, and it follows implicitly from everything mentioned below. I shall add more explicit comments as I go along.

Denmark, for reasons outlined below, was an ideal place for the crisis to start. Still, it must be understood also in an international context, including globalisation in –and through– the local and international media. It began in a local Danish daily and context but escalated and spread thanks to globalisation, the lack of centralised control over the media and the fact that there are many places with the right conditions for crisis like this to burst into flames. And there are many who are more than willing to fan the flames.

⁴ See <http://www.drawings.um.dk/en/menu/News/AllianceOfCivilizationsAndTheEUsRelationshipWithMuslimCountries.htm>.

⁵ S. Riordan, 'Alliance of Civilisations or "Alliance of the Civilised"?', Elcano Royal Institute, 3/4/06.

Powerful, critical and all-pervading media, the free press is a prerequisite for democracy. But it is also a problem because the media are not just critical and rational. The cartoon crisis started in *Jyllands-Posten*, as I see it, as a complex mixture of typical Muslim-bashing, a desire to provoke Muslims *and* a public debate, as a result of a loose idea and as a media stunt meant to entertain and make a profit.

To separate one motive from the other is difficult if at all possible. It is, moreover, counterproductive in terms of understanding. The mixture of motives is precisely what characterise the media in general, and in regard to the cartoon crisis as well. No matter how sincere other European dailies publishing the cartoons may have been when making reference to freedom of expression as a motive, they too had mixed motives. Furthermore, as events spiralled, the general sensationalist and confrontational focus of the media on crisis, war and conflict were among the main causes of the crisis and its escalation.

Consequently, journalists and editors around the globe have to seriously reconsider their responsibilities in a crisis like this and in regard to the problems highlighted by the crisis. They have to discuss how to balance their various motives and tasks: news as entertainment and news as critical analysis, the defence of freedom of expression and the responsibility for civilised conversation and national and international security. Censorship may not be good, but some self-censorship is a prerequisite for civilised cooperation and coexistence.

To discuss about and find this delicate balance is one of the challenges highlighted by the cartoon crisis, a challenge confronting, of course, not only the media but all of us. *Jyllands-Posten* most certainly succeeded in putting freedom of expression at the top of the agenda. It, did, however, also provoke equally heated debates on the need for self-censorship, restraint and civilised behaviour in the global village and in the press.

Another major precondition for the cartoon crisis is the current existence of conflicts and the resulting mistrust and frustration. As argued by a Danish scholar, the cartoon crisis must be understood in the context of a 'logic of war'. The war on terrorism, in discourse and in practice, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have produced more terrorists and caused further resentment against the allied nations (including Denmark) and against the West as such.

Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, double standards in regard to human rights, the continuing conflict in Palestine, poverty, despotic regimes supported by Western governments and the massive inflow of Western values into the Muslim world are all contributory factors. The list is long and it comes after centuries of colonialism and Western domination. No wonder quite a few people in the Middle East buy into conspiracy theories and ideas of the West trying to conquer them, to arrogantly implant democracy and Western standards –and to control their oil–. All these issues –including the problems with integrating Muslim minorities in most EU countries, the discussions about the integration of Turkey in the EU and the long-standing Western tradition of using Islam as the significant 'other'– have played a major role as the crisis flared up and spread.

Likewise, of course, quite a few people had their images of the enemy –referred to simply as Islam and Muslims (or, in a slightly more nuanced way, as Islamists)– confirmed by the reactions of some Muslims, especially of course the violent demonstrations on display in the media. But also the vehement verbal opposition uttered by many Muslim spokesmen to a freedom of expression that does not limit itself especially in regard to religion did, of course, confirm to many the notion of a real conflict in terms of values. And, this conflict, as I see it, cannot be denied. It is real and everybody had better realise this and do their

best to find out how we can all live in peace while having these differences of opinion. There is no alternative to a pragmatic solution. The 'other' is a part of 'us'.

Coming back to the de- and re-contextualisation of the cartoons as they were globalised by the media and various other agents, it does not take long to realise that the cartoons proved useful to many agents: The Egyptian government, in the midst of an election and in sore need to prove itself a true friend of Islam, could use it and most certainly has been very active in mobilising opposition to the cartoons. The Syrian and Saudi governments, with a similar need for popularity and control over Islamist groups ready to profit from the cartoon business at the cost of their governments, had their own agendas, while organisations like the OIC and the Arab League could use the issue to demonstrate both their *raison d'être* and their energy.

Consequently, no matter to what degree, many Muslims were truly offended by the cartoons. It is no easy matter to tell where religious feelings spill over into all these other issues. And all of the issues have to be considered if we want to use the cartoon crisis in a constructive way.

Religion and religious feelings, contrary to what many people think –whether religious or not– do not live lives of their own in splendid isolation from everything else. Religious feelings cannot be easily differentiated from feelings in general, and religion with its ethics, its social functions and its functioning in regard to the construction of identities, cannot easily be isolated from politics.

Neither is it an easy task to tell where sincere devotion to and defence of freedom of expression, at times expressed in ways comparable to the ways used by its religious opponents, stop and where cynical political considerations take over. The Danish Prime Minister was not just stubborn or even arrogant. He is, no doubt, also a man of principles in regard to freedom of expression and the press. But he is, of course, also a skilled politician, from the very beginning well aware that any kind of compromise might cost him the support of the Danish People's Party and of a substantial number of voters. Polls during the crisis speak very clearly: the crisis added support to the Danish People's Party and its hard-line policy in regard to immigration, Muslims and Islam.

This brings me to some of the reasons why Denmark can be seen as a perfect place for the crisis to materialise. The first reason is the many years of a pervasive political and populist anti-Muslim discourse –and of an intense conflict between those who support it and those who do not–. The connection of this discourse with a harsh immigration policy is also clear; a policy that has frequently been criticised by human rights agents for being out of line with international efforts to fight discrimination and racism, and, in some instances, for being directly discriminatory –even bordering on racism–.

The third issue, linked to this, is the government's actual handling of the crisis, including its unwillingness to admit mistakes and to listen to criticism, even from international human rights organisations. The government time and again has declined to create a special commission take a close look at the whole affair, and it has been extremely slow in sharing information with the special parliamentary committee dealing with matters of security and foreign policy. Besides, it has in several cases denied public access to the documents that might be relevant in order to analyse the development of the crisis and the government's handling of it. This, of course, seems strange to many observers, not least because the government has been so principled in its support of freedom of expression and the press. Allow me, however, to focus on Denmark's anti-Muslim climate and discourse.

In my opinion, to understand the publication of the cartoons it is this that one has to deal with first, rather than with a threat to democracy and freedom of expression by way of a marked tendency to self-censorship out of fear from Muslim reprisals. Denmark, as regards xenophobia and Islamophobia,⁶ is a special case in Europe due to the government's close connection to –and dependence on– the Danish People's Party, which strategically uses neo-nationalist and cultural-exclusivist discourses on 'Danishness' and the clash of civilisations and thrives on xenophobia (or the Islamophobe version of it).

The Danish People's Party has managed to influence public discourse and realpolitik ever since one of its forerunners, Mogens Glistrup, declared in the 1980s that immigrant Muslims were the greatest danger to Danish welfare and culture. Although Glistrup was convicted several times for racist hate-mongering, others, including leading politicians, quite often have managed to get away with it, as the police argue that politicians should have an especially wide-ranging freedom of expression. Glistrup himself got away, for instance, with saying that Muslim immigrants were procreating like rats.

Examples of hate-mongering by politicians are legion. Louise Frevert, a leading member of the Danish People's Party, running for mayor of Copenhagen at the time of the cartoon crisis, called Muslims a 'cancer' to Denmark at her website and in another publication. The police dismissed the charges filed against her, freeing her of responsibility for the text on her website. Two other MPs, both formerly ministers in the established state-supported Lutheran-Protestant Church, are famous for their outspoken dislike for Islam, with both of them claiming that Islam and Muslim immigrants ought to be the central issue in Danish politics. And they have actually managed to make it so.

The Party's leader, Pia Kjaersgaard, is of the same opinion. To give but one example, before the cartoons were published, in her weekly newsletter on 13 May, Kjaersgaard said that areas in Copenhagen and other big cities have become 'populated by people on a lower stage of civilisation. Bringing with them primitive and barbaric customs, killing in the name of honour, enforcing marriages, halal-slaughtering, and in favour of blood revenge.' At other times, she and others who are like-minded simply state that 'the muslim way of life is incompatible with the Danish Christian way of thinking'. In Denmark, the idea that Islam and Muslim immigrants constitute a fifth-column as part of an Islamist master plan to take over the world and the Kingdom of Denmark goes back many years before 9/11.

To illustrate to what degree this discourse has become normalised and taken over by government ministers –giving the UN Special Rapporteur good reasons to think as he does–, two examples may be mentioned: At the annual meeting of the Conservative People's Party, the Minister of Cultural affairs declared that:

'(A) medieval Muslim culture (will never be) as valid here in Denmark as Danish culture... There are still many battles to win. The most important ones have to do with the confrontation we witness when seeing how immigrants from Muslim countries refuse to respect Danish culture and European norms. In the midst of our country, parallel societies are developing, with minorities practising their medieval norms and undemocratic ways of thinking. We cannot and must not accept this' (author's translation).

Clearly, the cultural war declared by the government as it came to power is directly aimed at Muslim immigrants. The speech was delivered on 23 September, less than a week before the publication of the cartoons.

⁶ Report after report seem to document the overall tendency in all Europe. See the websites of EUMC and ENAR, and add the report mentioned above from the UN Special Rapporteur.

However, the speech was neither criticised nor modified by the Prime Minister. Actually, he himself, just a year before, in his opening speech to parliament on 5 October 2004, said that:

‘Certain spiritual leaders, imams and muftis (...) vehemently oppose integration with their utterances in favour of the suppression of women, their religious demands on the young generation and their obdurate preaching. I know that most Muslims in this country do not share the medieval view of life of these imams and muftis, but I am worried because these fanatic religious leaders are contributing to the creation of divides and confrontation in Denmark’ (author’s translation).

Coming back to the blame put on certain ‘imams’, the statement indicates –despite the fact that the Prime Minister is wise enough to talk about ‘certain’ imams and not to put all Muslims in the same bag– that at the top level of government generalisations and prejudice thrive. Except for a very few documented and specific cases relating to a very limited number of imams, there simply is no research to document the accusations made by the Prime Minister, and all research, furthermore, indicates that the influence of the imams on the 200,000 registered Muslims in Denmark is marginal. No more than around 10%-15 % attend Friday prayers in the mosques and the vast majority of Muslims seem to be more interested in getting a job, having fun and taking care of their families than in the sayings of the few imams who have made it to the front pages of the newspapers.

Moving to *Jyllands-Posten*, I find it fair to say that I do not share the widespread view that *Jyllands-Posten* –prior to the publication of the cartoons– can be said to represent *only* a pro-government and anti-Muslim attitude. It most certainly never represented a secularist attitude, at least not in regard to the majority and state religion. *Jyllands-Posten* has produced fair reports on Muslim practices and beliefs, sometimes showing great sensibility to religious feelings.

Yet *Jyllands-Posten*, in its editorials also, has nevertheless contributed to the typical anti-Muslim discourse. To give but one example: during a harsh debate in 2001 as some young Danes with immigrant backgrounds entered politics, *Jyllands-Posten* clearly subscribed to unsubstantiated Islamophobic allegations, accusing these young politicians of being Islamists in democratic clothing and fifth-columnists of militant Islam. At the time, the cartoonist responsible for the cartoon showing Muhammad with a bomb in his turban, draw a cartoon showing one of the young Muslim politicians entering Denmark through a gate of Danish flags. The young man is depicted as if he were hiding his true identity while the clothes he wears clearly indicate his militant past –and hidden motivations–. The cartoon was meant to illustrate an article written by Bertel Haarder, at that time a member of the European Parliament and later the Minister of Refugee, Immigrant and Integration Affairs who implemented the severe immigration policies adopted by the present government and the Danish People’s Party. Haarder, famous for mocking immigrant Muslim women and men settling in Sweden because of the Danish requirements for family reunification and marriages involving ‘foreigners’, is now the Minister of Education and of Ecclesiastical affairs.

The cartoon depicting Muhammad with a bomb in his turban might not only indicate that all Muslims are potential terrorists, but also that Islam is a religion of terror, or that Muhammad is used to legitimise terror. Most likely, in line with the public discourse, including articles and editorials in *Jyllands-Posten*, it indicates the opinion that immigrant Muslims and Islam in general are time-bombs and a threat to Danish culture.

Jyllands-Posten launched the publication of the cartoons almost as an act of civil disobedience or freedom fighting: an act of resistance to the tendency, among other dailies and intellectuals, to self-censorship and the suppression of freedom of expression due to a threat from Islam, which is well on its way to winning the local and global culture wars that are becoming true clashes of civilisations. However, as indicated above, the 'Face of Muhammed' can also be seen as nothing more but a further example of Islam-bashing, another element in a discourse legitimising discrimination and the government's harsh policies. This is yet another example of how a reference to 'freedom of expression' and 'democratic values' can be an excuse for saying whatever you want about the 'significant other' and about what is considered a problem minority.

Consequently, when the Public Prosecutor, in his decision not to institute criminal proceedings, argues that a 'direct and informal form of debate is not unusual in Denmark, where even offensive and insulting expressions of opinion are widely accepted', he is no doubt right. Unfortunately, as indicated by the examples of hate-mongering mentioned above (and the restraint exercised by *Jyllands-Posten* in publishing what might be considered blasphemous drawings of Jews and Christians), there seem to be groups in Denmark that are more likely to be the target of offensive and insulting expressions and opinions than others. As I mentioned in an interview with *Jyllands-Posten* on the very day the cartoons were printed, not knowing that they were cartoons and not simply innocent drawings, one may well ask *Jyllands-Posten* and others who defend freedom of expression and the right to mock and scorn religious feelings and people, why this defence was not launched the year before when a small group of Christians managed to make a supermarket stop selling sandals with pictures of Jesus.

Looking at the reactions to the cartoons by some Muslims, as well as at the letter dated 12 October and sent to the Prime Minister by 11 ambassadors from Muslim countries, it is evident that the cartoons were merely the last straw. They are reacting against what they consider an anti-Muslim smear campaign and they are asking the Prime Minister to help put a stop to it. They refer explicitly to examples of racist anti-Muslim statements. In his answer to the ambassadors, the Prime Minister actually seemed to realise this, mentioning the government's initiatives to foster dialogue.

Yet (and this no doubt was one of the most serious mistakes made by the Prime Minister) he declined to meet the ambassadors and insisted on the principle of freedom of expression, stressing time and again that, as Minister for the Press also, he could and would not interfere with the practice of freedom of the press. In terms of intercultural communication and diplomacy, it was of course not very clever to refuse to meet them. Probably, the entire crisis might have been avoided by such a diplomatic and civilised gesture. He could have said what he said in his written reply, but he could have done so face to face, demonstrating and expressing his understanding for their concern and distancing himself and the government from any anti-Muslim and racist discourse. He actually did so later the same autumn in response to utterances in the parliament from a member of the Danish People's Party, and he did so in his New Year's address to the nation.

Furthermore, the government and the Prime Minister kept insisting that the ambassadors actually wanted him to use the relevant laws to interfere with *Jyllands-Posten*, and that this demand forced him to refuse. However, it has by now been proved that not only did the Prime Minister respond to a *draft* letter from the ambassadors but he also misread its wording. 'We deplore these statements and publications and urge Your Excellency's government to take all those responsible to task *under the law of the land* (...)' does *not* mean that he should take the law in his own hands or break the law, but that he should act within the existing law.

Besides, the tone in several statements by the Prime Minister on this issue clearly justified the anger expressed by the both the Egyptian ambassador and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who claimed that the Prime Minister's attitude had been arrogant, demeaning and condescending, clearly revealing his notion that these 'foreigners' are incapable of understanding the rules of a democracy.

There are also a few considerations to be made regarding the (in)famous imams who travelled around the Middle East in November and December to raise support in their efforts to make the government react against the cartoons and what they considered a defamatory campaign in Denmark against Islam and Muslims in general.

It is true that the imams took with them other caricatures, in addition to those published in *Jyllands-Posten*, but this might have been due to their wish to demonstrate that the cartoons were but the last straw. Furthermore, the imams might have induced the subsequent reactions from the OIC, the Arab League and others. They might even have used words and translations of texts that were not completely true to the facts in Denmark, while their behaviour most likely made it possible for various agents to use the cartoon crisis for their own purposes. The imams most certainly were one of the many factors to lead, much later on, to the boycott and the demonstrations.

However, to explain the escalation of the crisis merely by reference to the imams is not only to oversimplify matters. It is a problematic and dangerous way of detracting critical attention from all the other reasons, including those for which the government might be held partly responsible. It borders on the singling out of scapegoats, and tends to become another example of using Islam and the imams to conceal severe problems of a different nature.

Besides, as I see it, one has to take the imams' claims seriously, namely that they acted as they did from fear that the cartoon crisis might prompt frustrated and marginalised young Muslims in Denmark to engage in violence and even terrorism. It should also be considered that the Director of Danish Intelligence has complimented the imams for their cooperation during the crisis and that there have so far been no violent reactions among Danish Muslims. To call the imams traitors to be expelled from the country and to do the same with those who tried to nuance the debate on the imams is symptomatic of the discursive strategies of the Danish People's Party. It is, however, not in accordance with the stress laid on freedom of expression.

What lessons has the government learnt? The Prime Minister had learnt some lessons even before the cartoon crisis exploded in late January. Criticism of the tone of the public debate, of the government's immigration policies and the treatment of refugees and the Prime Minister's refusal to meet the Muslim ambassadors was raised in the autumn by intellectuals, ministers of the established church and a group of former ambassadors. During the autumn of 2005, and most conspicuously in his address to the nation at New Year, the Prime Minister distanced himself from any unfair demonising of Muslims. But he did not, as noted above, distance himself from the declaration of war against backward Muslims made by his Minister of Cultural Affairs, and it took a boycott and the burning of Danish embassies to make him publicly declare in *al-Arabiyya* that he and the Danes in general had great respect for Islam and the religious feelings of Muslims.

Another lesson learnt by the Prime Minister is that religion, as he sees it, has come to play a far too important role in the public sphere. But the Prime Minister has not yet made it clear how he wants to make sure that religion remains in the private sphere, in Denmark and elsewhere. Besides the fact that Denmark is, constitutionally speaking, not a secular nation, in so far as it is bound by the constitution to the local variety of Lutheran-Protestant Christianity, he has a Minister of Education (and Ecclesiastical Affairs) who has

announced that he does not want state schools to be secular (much to the surprise of all those who thought they already were). On the contrary, he wants to religious education to make pupils more familiar with the Christian religion and heritage.

With the neo-nationalist Danish People's Party cherishing a 'Danishness' based on Christian history and heritage and led by two ministers of the church, one may well wonder how he imagines that religion can be removed from Danish politics and from the public sphere. One cannot help but suspect that he is not thinking of *all* religions or all aspects of religion. As for his expressed respect for religious feelings, it should also be noted that Jens Rhode, the Venstre parliamentary group's spokesman, answered in response to the UN Special Rapporteur's criticism that he could not care less. Besides, as Rhode put it, 'a man from Senegal, sitting in a centre on racial discrimination is not the one to exercise mind control'.

As for the Danish People's Party, it seems that it too has learnt a lesson. In late January, its leader, Pia Kjaersgaard, ordered the members of the party to try to differentiate between Muslims and Islamists. So far, however, her order has not exactly been followed by everyone, and she herself has been quick to condemn the imams for using their right to freedom of expression. Likewise, her reaction to an announcement made by the Grand Mufti of Egypt is revealing: Kjaersgaard said that if he (the mufti) did not have so much influence 'in a backward and ignorant part of the world' as he actually does, then she would not give a damn about what he says or not.

As regards the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, today and at the time of the crisis, one cannot but admit that it tries its best. At its official website –as well as in responses to various critics, such as the UN Special Rapporteur– its highlights passages of past and present speeches of various Ministers as proof of a tolerant, inclusive and respectful attitude and policies towards Muslims in general and towards immigrants in Denmark. The problem, of course, is that as indicated above the selection is highly selective.

As shown by an analysis of the FAQ related to the cartoon crisis,⁷ some of the answers do not tell the whole story, and it can even be said that they are the same mixture of 'half-truth' and 'half-lie' that the imams have been accused of. One of many examples is the statement that the Queen of Denmark has made no critical comments of Islam. Certainly, the reference to her New Year's address is correct, but in a book on interviews with the Queen published in 2005 she speaks about Islam in a way that could very well be called not only critical but in line with the dominant public discourse on Islam as the enemy.

As for more direct action, the government has launched and re-launched several high-profile projects in line with initiatives such as the 'Alliance of Civilisations'; the 'Arabic Initiative', mentioned above and launched in 2003, is being re-launched because of the damage caused by the cartoon crisis; a special envoy to the Middle East has been appointed; dialogue forums have been established and financed; and the Ministry has even taken the trouble to announce that (finally) there now seems to be –with the government's help, of course– a solution to the problem of finding a location for Denmark's first Muslim cemetery.

However, as leading figures in Danish business have said time and again, Denmark's image has been seriously damaged by the crisis. A leading British 'branding' consultant and specialist, Simon Anholt, agrees. It will take more than a cosmetic facelift and some smart marketing to restore it. If the Prime Minister thinks (and he has expressed this view) that the cartoon crisis has made Denmark better known throughout the world and that this

⁷ See <http://www.drawings.um.dk/en/menu/QuestionsAndAnswers/>. As for the criticism of the FAQ at the website, see Rune Engelbreht, *Politiken*, 17/3/06.

a perfect opportunity to market Danish goods, then he is wrong, while to market Denmark as the capital of freedom of expression will be even harder. If millions of Muslims think that Denmark is a hotbed of racism and xenophobia, then the Danes have to seriously consider to what a degree it might be true. And if, as the government continues to insist in response to criticism, this is not true then it has to be proved in practice.

As noted by DACoRD, an independent Danish centre for documentation on race discrimination, in connection with a recent opinion (March 10) by CERD blaming the Danish state for not taking the measures needed to combat racial discrimination, there has long been a marked tendency to downplay racial discrimination in the country. Most often, both the police and the public prosecutor, as in the cartoons' case, choose not to raise charges for violations of section 266b of the Criminal Code, the article protecting groups against scorn and degradation on account of their religion.

Conclusions: At the time of writing, a new and critical report from the European Committee on Racial Discrimination is on its way. As so often before, the government took the opportunity to leak its response to the press, trying to kill criticism even before the report was publicly released. This unfortunately seems to be the government's usual way of dealing with criticism. Another characteristic response is to simply deny the accusation by saying the government's policy cannot be wrong since other European nations are aiming to copy Denmark's immigration policies.

Of course, this is not a very convincing argument, and looking back at the cartoon crisis one can only warn the other EU countries not to adopt too many of Denmark's policies and instead to be more open to criticism and try their best to find new ways to deal with Islamic and Muslim immigrants. One piece of advice is to not downplay racism and discrimination but to do more to get rid of them. Another piece of useful advice is to downplay the importance of religion and culture in regard to integration and instead concentrate on social improvements, education and employment and to foster a critical but civilised public and political debate. Balanced criticism of aspects of Muslim ways of practicing and thinking Islam is both positive and advisable; but so is criticism of all religions and their practitioners, as well as of everything non-religious, including the policies to be implemented in regard to integration and the Muslim world.

Tim Jensen

*General Secretary of IAHR –The International Association for The History of Religions–
and Head of the department of The Study of Religions, University of Southern Denmark*