

# Nazia Hussain Key Note Speech: Eurocities: 11 March 2015

## **State of Europe Today**

Since 1993, as part of its mandate to build vibrant and open democratic societies, the Open Society Foundations has undertaken programmes on a variety of issues promoting the rights of the marginalised, including ethnic and religious minorities, the white working class and the Roma. The latter were aimed at Central and South East European countries in an effort to support accession criteria to join the European Union and become closer to the model of their Western and Northern European neighbours. However, attitudes to minorities in Western Europe were growing in hostility in the late 1990s and following major terrorist attacks in the USA, London and Madrid, there was a noticeable shift in Western European political, public and media rhetoric, actions, policies and practices. Integration and immigration policies became closely linked with security policies as a response to the threat of violent extremism. Post Charlie Hebdo and Copenhagen this approach has been reinforced with the myriad of security legislation in a bid to fight terrorism.

At times, it is difficult to decipher the difference between immigrant prejudice and anti-Muslim sentiment. Politicians speak of the need for minorities, migrants, newcomers and in particular Muslims to share European values, to end supposed self-segregation; to speak the national language and display an aversion to visible manifestations of religion- full face veils and hijabs in particular. In this context, certain groups, such as Muslims and migrants, shift back and forth from a security to a cultural threat. Hostile rhetoric at the increasing visibility of minorities, rapid demographic transformations of large cities across Europe and the rise and insistence of politics of fear, is the environment in which human rights organisations, civil society, institutions, city administrations and other urban actors operate today.

## **Facts about Migration in Europe**

The world is changing and rapidly. The last decades have seen an intense and concerted movement of people where the traditional notions of home and rootedness are very different from generations ago. This movement is leading to a rise in the competition for resources (housing, jobs, public services); a toxic discourse on identity and culture and an environment in which mainstream democratic tools no longer work for some.

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The population of Europe stands at just over approximately 741 million. The number of people living in the European Union (EU) is just under 500 million. Of

this figure approximately 20 million are non-EU living in the EU. According to EUROSTAT, during 2012, there was an estimated 1.7 million immigrants to the EU 27 from countries outside the EU. In addition, 1.7 million of people previously residing in one of the EU member states migrated to another member state. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013, the foreign population, with citizenship of a non-member country, living in the EU 27, was 20.4 million (4.1%), while the foreign born (but EU citizens) was 13.7 million. The largest numbers of non-EU nationals living in the EU are found in Germany, (7.7 million), Spain (5.1 million), UK (4.9 million), Italy (4.4 million) and France (4.1 million).

The above demonstrates a rapid change in the numbers, backgrounds and profiles of people who form our communities in our cities today. Demographic change matters. Our society is aging and, according to EUROSTAT projections, the share of young people in the total population is expected to fall in the years up to 2060. In January 2011, 95.2 million people aged 15 to 29 lived in the EU 27. The candidate countries add another 22 million to this figure. European minority communities are more youthful than their native European counterparts. For example, people under 30 comprised about 49 per cent of the Muslim population in Europe in 2010 compared with 34 per cent of the non-Muslim population. This includes Turkey. Europe's Muslim population is projected to remain relatively youthful in the coming two decades. As we debate the demographics and shape of European society, migration and immigrants plays a large role in the future fabric of our societies.

### **Politics and Parties**

The history and changing demographics of Europe are not enough in attempting to understand Europe today. Another factor to understand the response to immigration and integration policies is the disenfranchisement of wider society with political parties. Traditional parties have failed, in many states, to include and represent the needs of its increasingly diverse set of constituencies and people. There is a deep-seated crisis of faith and trust in the state. More left-leaning parties do socio- economic interests well but what they don't do well is identity politics.

Europe has seen a rapid change in its makeup and appearance and people need answers which the traditional parties do not always provide responses to. Rightist parties have picked up the nationalist, protectionist discourse and have zoned in on people's fears and exploited the rapid change by offering an explanation: **It's immigration**. An example is the upcoming UK general election where immigration, yet again, is the priority issue. The far right press has also played a role in this. The casualty of the immigration debate or, indeed the lack of a proper and nuanced debate, is the re-emergence of overt racism and inequality, which ironically, Europe is renowned elsewhere, to have tackled.

In amongst the above scenario, there are glimmers of hope. The rise of xenophobia and in particular anti-Islam platforms and far right parties such as

PEGIDA in Germany, the English Defence League in the UK, the Freedom Party in the Netherlands, Front Nationale in France, The Finns Party in Finland, the Sweden Democrats and the Danish People's Party to name a few is a disturbing modern face of Europe, However, we have seen some prominent political leaders stand up and voice their condemnation of such prejudice. A few more influential political voices decrying this hatred and exclusionary politics, would be nice

### **Why the City?**

The city is at the frontline of demographic, economic, cultural, social and political change. Many of the cities in this room have been the traditional home of migrants over centuries. Many communities have come and settled and made their home there; brought their languages, cultures, food and rituals and integrated well and contributed to creating vibrant, urban spaces renowned for their uniqueness, buzz, vitality and hospitality. However, as people arrive, stay and leave our cities, we are in danger of mismanaging this as, in the words of Doug Saunders, it is viewed as a 'negligible background noise or a fate of others that we can avoid in our own countries. We are in danger of suffering far larger explosions and ruptures. Some aspects of this great migration are already unfolding in front of us'. He says we do not understand this migration because we do not know how to look at it. We do not know where to look, we have no place and no name for the locus of our new world'. (Arrival City<sup>1</sup>)

### **Open Society Foundations Research: Muslims, Somalis and White Working Class Findings**

The Open Society Foundations has been undertaking evidence-based advocacy and grant making on the marginalised in Western Europe for a decade. In 2007, we began by focusing on the situation of Muslims in 11 cities for all the aforementioned reasons. We wanted to extract the actual voices of populations in these cities, find good practices for cities to share with others and offer an independent analysis of integration policies and action plans to policy-makers and officials who were grappling with the challenges of social cohesion as well as responding to national policies, to ensure an open, integrated, safe and strong environment for all. As we conducted the work on Muslims, followed by Somalis, we recognized that successful integration policies need to involve all parts of the population. This includes engaging with the marginalised white working class communities who seem to be the target of far right parties and platforms and whose grievances were not being heard.

Over the last seven years, we have spoken with an estimated 5,000 citizens and residents in 17 cities in 10 countries, Muslims, Somalis, members of majority populations as well as national and city officials, policy makers and politicians at local, national and EU levels. Our three major research projects Muslims in EU Cities; Somalis in European cities and Europe's White Working Class, focused on providing a comparative view across cities in Europe on the social inclusion

opportunities and challenges facing city politicians and officials dealing with long standing and newly arrived migrant populations. We found the following:

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**A MIXED PICTURE** There is a **positive picture** of integration at the local level. All three groups are resilient and vibrant but suffer from negative stereotyping in the media. Key concerns were quite ordinary: better municipal services, cleaning of streets, street lights, more policing, and better quality schools. Communities, including the white working class, displayed evidence of a close knit network of kinship, which at times serves as a way of helping people cope with low incomes and job insecurity. In our white working class research, participants expressed openness towards people of different cultural backgrounds and willingness to interact with them but there was a strong emphasis on the need for migrants to learn the cultural habits and values of the majority; language was seen as a significant barrier to this.

A **strong religious identity** correlates with a strong sense of belonging and integration. The second generation Muslim population has a stronger sense of belonging than the first and visible religious identity or practice does not affect sense of belonging. Religious discrimination, however, remains a critical barrier to full and meaningful participation in society.

Perceptions remain of differences in **values**. This was evident across all three groups where, when asked what their values were, they unanimously stated the same: respect for the rule of law, tolerance of all faiths and freedom of expression and belief. They felt, however, that certain groups did not share the same values. What was important here to understand was the perception game and the ways in which policy- and decision makers address this, or not, as the case may be.

Muslims and Somalis saw themselves as British, Swedish, Dutch, etc but felt others in society did not see them as equal and full citizens. This again was a crucial finding in terms of how decision-makers react and address this concern.

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**Education:** education plays a hugely important role in determining people's access to the labour market in later life, as well as their wider participation in society. It is also where the effects of social inequality are keenly felt. There is a clear link between disadvantaged socio-economic background and low educational achievement. Educational inequality might manifest itself as high drop- out rates, poor exam results or discrimination in the selection of children for the upper tiers of secondary education.

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**Employment:** in recent decades, there has been a shift in western European economies away from industry and towards the service sector. This has had a particular impact on working class communities, with reliable, local manufacturing jobs being replaced in many cases by low paid precarious work. The effects of the recession, combined with the austerity policies of certain governments, have increased the pressure on marginalised communities with rising costs adding to the sense of insecurity.

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Discrimination is acute for Muslims with a visible Muslim identity (headscarf). Employment rates amongst Somali women are particularly low and whilst efforts are being made to get them into the labour market, progress is slow for a variety of reasons.

**Political participation:** increasing participation amongst the marginalised facilitates political equality and their effective autonomy. Through participation, people can promote their self-esteem and an inclusive civic identity. Political participation is strong at the local and city level where there are greater levels of trust in city councils than in national parliament. There was a high level of dissatisfaction with the political process and distrust of national institutions, especially from the white working class, but there was also a desire to have a say in managing their surroundings, especially at the local level. Where cities interacted and supported single faith and ethnic groups, the level of trust was higher as was the belief that they could influence decisions in their city.

Where people are eligible to vote they exercise that right. The most obvious expression of political discontent and the one that has generated much media coverage in recent years is when people vote for a populist or far right party. Patterns of support for these parties are varied and complex but suggest a close link to a feeling of powerlessness and the sense that mainstream politicians break their promises. In this context voters may see immigration or cultural diversity as yet another sign that they do not have control over the political process.

**Media consumption** is an act of citizenship and creates the sense of the other in society. Recent years have seen a growth in the negative media image of Muslims, Somalis and the white working class. The trend is more pronounced in the UK where the rise of the 'chav' stereotype in newspaper coverage and television documentation and reality TV and comedies has been much commented on. In tandem, stories outlining the negative effects of migration on the National Health Service, the public housing sector and labour market also feature strongly, at least in the UK. Such reporting contributes to the negative image of neighbourhoods which deters business investment and professionals from working

in those areas. Countering such perceptions is an important part of any regeneration programme.

In an effort to counter such negative stereotypes, At Home in Europe produced and launched a series of graphic novel stories to promote research on Somali populations in seven European cities called Meet the Somalis. The cartoons are a device to get attention for a group that does not feature in the news cycle, and does not evoke much interest even in politically concerned Europeans.

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## **BEST PRACTICES**

We came across a number of very good examples where cities have embraced their diversity and new and old immigrant groups, some more openly than others. In Amsterdam, the Wij Amsterdammers campaign was a municipality-led bid to create a strong civic local identity which, amongst minorities at least succeeded. During our white working class research in Amsterdam north, however, we were told that the local residents weren't even aware that this was taking place.

In Leicester, the multi faith council recognized the plurality of faiths in its city, brought together Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, atheists who were in touch with the pulse of their communities and were able to act as an early warning sign to the city of imminent trouble but also rally their flocks behind them. A prime example of this was when the English Defence League was marching in Leicester and the multi faith council was able to speak to their communities and deter them from a violent response to the march.

In June 2012, an opera was staged in the Floradorp neighbourhood in Amsterdam North. Leading stars were residents of the neighbourhood and the opera was a civic initiative of a resident and documentary maker, supported by the Housing Corporation and the sub-municipality. It was crowd funded and with many volunteers. The opera was seen as very successful and its coverage in the local media contrasted sharply with previous negative portrayals of the area as a place of riots and misbehavior.

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The Oasis centre in Trigeparken in Aarhus is a centre where residents associations organise activities and social workers can be found. It was described by residents as a pivotal institution for the sense of belonging in Trigeparken. In the words of one resident:

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*Something is being done.. to avoid crime and to strengthen residents. The Oasis has a lot of events and activities.. which makes it a good place to live. Also, since we are very multi cultural out here, you meet a lot of people across ethnicities. I actually think it's an enriching factor that you live in a place where there are so many different cultures, and that they do something at the Oasis for you to meet across cultures'.<sup>ii</sup>*

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## **Conclusion**

I started this speech outlining the negative and have moved into the positive. This is analogous with the national versus local rhetoric that we are faced with every day. If we read our national newspapers, we would think that we are under siege from the migrating hordes from the South. The reality is, that when we take a long hard look, as objective as we can be, at our surroundings, in areas that matter, and are crucial to inclusion, people are overcoming barriers, be they religious or socio economic. To a large extent, the issues that face people - and matters to people - in our research, are removed from religious and ethnic consideration and are about tackling deprivation and creating opportunities for all. It also means taking into account how services in city can adapt and be further supported at the national level to meaningfully address and implement change. For example, information provision remains key to better informed residents.

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However, discrimination in its many forms remains a critical barrier to full and equal participation. It is persistent and growing and the very idea of a multi-cultural society is questioned. Whilst identity is strong at the local level, people still have concerns about the (perceived) lack of shared values or perceptions, and spaces and places for people to interact are few and far between - how to create a space and narrative where the marginalised are seen as part of the whole of society means overcoming the anxiety about its ethnic and religious diversity.

No bad model of integration exists. Some may not be successful as others in certain areas. An exemplary model is one which is holistic in its outlook and includes all components, including the cultural. The cultural component is the one that tells the story of the narrative of what a society is and who belongs in it. A good model is one that understands that inclusion must encompass three levels: the individual, the collective and the institutional. It needs to have the requirement of advancing political participation and social justice. In a nutshell, it is access to citizenship, labour market policies for meaningful employment and

access to political participation. It also includes the need to eradicate the fear of the other.

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History has shown that accepting and accommodating new communities takes time. It is not going to happen overnight and it will not happen in the next four years or however long the term of a national leader is. It is also imbued with conflict, a natural element of any change in society.

Europe is changing and its cities first and foremost. Strong political leadership is not solely the responsibility of our national leaders. It is the cities, their council, their representatives that understand changes being wrought and must be able and willing to fight prejudice and stem fear. They can do this by using their powers as democratic institutions, employers, service providers, public contractors and rule makers to promote equality. But do they is the question and if they do, do they do it well enough?

Many of us in this room come from cities which have long standing immigrant communities and in many instances have prospered as a result of migration. Despite this, and I revert back to Doug Saunders, we claim not to know “where to look and how to deal with it.”

I claim that we have the tools at our disposal but also that we don’t pick them up. They are our citizens and residents who are of immigrant background, are integrated, may have a visible religious appearance, but whose difference is viewed as a challenge to our European values and principles. These values, premised on fairness and tolerance, are under threat.

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<sup>i</sup> Doug Saunders, *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping Our World*. (2011)

<sup>ii</sup> *White Working Class Communities Aarhus*, Open Society Foundations, 2014:

<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/white-working-class-communities-aarhus>