



CONFERENCE REPORT

BOOK LAUNCH

“MUSULMANI IN ITALIA IMPATTI URBANI E SOCIALI DELLE COMUNITÀ ISLAMICHE DI ROMA”

By Arnold Koka

The Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) hosted, on the 18th of June 2018 at its headquarters in Rome, the launch of the book “Musulmani in Italia, Impatti Urbani e Sociali delle Comunità Islamiche di Roma”, by Fabrizio Ciocca, independent sociologist who has focused his studies on multi-ethnic urban systems. The book constitutes an analysis of the urban and social effects of the Islamic communities in the city of Rome, basing its social and demographic research on primary sources and on a comprehensive statistical analysis of the data collected by the author.

The event was moderated by EGIC’s analyst Antonino Occhiuto, who opened the session contextualising the issue of Islamic communities in Europe. Occhiuto pointed out some of the key historical and social factors that embittered Islamophobia across the West and consequently affected integration of Islamic communities.

Counterproductive strategies, towards Muslim’s cultural and urban integration started after 9/11. On the one hand an authoritarian approach–exemplified by the Patriot Act– has led to the intervening into specific personal rights. On the other hand, one that tended to underestimate the problem, indirectly helping the ghettoisation and the marginalisation of minorities not intervening in with regard to social needs and issues. Moreover, the international economic crisis, along with the social and political turmoil the Middle East, have paved the way to instability and have created further conditions to drive local population towards the choice of migration.

The economic collapse of 2009 in Europe has created vast sacks of poverty and social instability, expanding a fertile ground –made of the most poor and vulnerable parts of population– for the rise nationalist and xenophobic parties across Europe.

As a result, the perception of the migration problem has overpassed the effective economic and social effects of the phenomenon itself.

In this scenario, international cooperation represents a key aspect to highlight and to focus on to deal and solve social and cultural issues. A lack of cooperation between European and Middle Eastern countries, concluded Occhiuto, could possibly bring to the severance of diplomatic relations.

Dr Ciocca then took the floor, starting with a general overview and contextualisation of the demographic and statistical data analysed in his work.

A key factor considered in his analysis is the demographic forecast of the extension of Islamic communities and Muslims in the next 30 years. Influenced by migratory processes, by the high fertility rate and the prospect of family reunification for the migrants, the expectations of a consistent increase of Muslims in Europe are high: according to the data analysed by Ciocca, even considering an improbable decrease of the migratory phenomenon – the Muslim population size in Europe would increase of between 10 and 20 million people by 2050. In terms of size of population, Ciocca stressed the misperception by the public opinion of the real number of Muslims in Italy, which are believed to be 5 times more than their real number.

That is a direct consequence, according to the author, of a consistent misrepresentation and of a nationalist narrative carried out by nationalists and xenophobic parties.

In a context of a high demographic diversification, according to Ciocca the city of Rome represents an emblematic case-study for the social and urban effects that the city has underwent due to the increase of its Muslim residents. Remarkably, the diversification of origin countries - 42 different ones- of the Muslim migrants, which in the case of the Italian Capital constitute the 3,8% of the residents in the city, arises two complex issues. The first one is political-dealing and creating a cooperation system between the Islamic community and local and state authorities; The second one is social and urban- creating appropriate, registered and legal areas where the Islamic religion can be adequately practiced.

In this specific case, the connection between the diverse origins of the Islamic communities and the lack of a standardised regulation is clear in the presence of about 50 different unofficial religious centres in Rome, mostly condensed in the East of the city. Ciocca pointed out that only one religious site in Rome – officially recognised by the State – is “La Grande Moschea di Roma.”

According to the author, that's not only a consequence of the diversification of cultures, and so of the difficulty to create dialogue and cooperation with several different communities, but of the general national system of creating agreements between the Islamic communities and the State: the system itself, is a result of a 1929's law, and until today only one Islamic Cultural Centre has reached an agreement –and so a recognition– by the Italian State.

In the urban framework, such approach has led to the empowerment of the city mayors, that are now responsible of the regulation of the religious sites and centres in their own city. A practice that has transferred and constrained a national issue into a mere local one.

However, according to Ciocca, the lack so far of a clear and specific integration model by the Italian State could represent an unexpected opportunity. The focus on 2nd-generation migrants, granting rights and favouring the concession of the citizenship through a jus soli-based legislation –granting the birthright citizenship, could favour a greater national identity, and so a deeper integration of the Islamic communities.

The Euro-Gulf Information Centre, through its analyses, conferences and cultural events is constantly working at building a network of experts in relevant fields with the ultimate goal of contributing guidance to policymakers for effective cross-regional and international peace building. This book launch, and past events, constitute some relevant examples of how we address current national international challenges such as national integration, social and cultural progress towards a more cooperative and cohesive legislative and social structure between local minorities and the State. Malfunctioning affects Europe and its international ties in several different ways.