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To: undisclosed-recipients;  
 Subject: EU-Islam talks reject clash of civilisations theory

14/02/2002 02:58 µµ

From Tony Robinson, Spokesman, Party of European Socialists  
 14 Feb, Granada. Tel +32-475-257410

A tough-talking first session of the PES Winter University on EU relations with the world of Islam today rejected theories of a clash of civilisations and called for a dialogue between cultures.

Muslim speakers at the meeting in Granada, Spain, repeatedly attacked negative Western media portrayals of Islam that link the religion to terrorism. They called for Muslims to be allowed to play their full role in European life and condemned injustice towards Muslim communities.

The Winter University, which concludes tomorrow, was established by the Party of European Socialists as part of its commitment to build stronger links between the EU and Islam in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. The meeting is co-organised by the PES with the PES Group in the European Parliament and the Spanish Socialist Party, PSOE.

PES President Robin Cook is to make the keynote speech this evening.

In a first session on "Politics and religion \* transmission of intercultural knowledge", Riay Tatory of the Spanish Union of Islamic communities said: "Muslims can give a soul to Europe. Islamic values of solidarity, hospitality and tolerance can contribute to peaceful coexistence."

But he added: "What worries me is that dialogue is only focusing on some interests. The Mediterranean has two shores and on our faces we have two eyes to see justice and injustice. We are not condemning the injustice committed every day in Palestine."

Law professor at the University of Rabat, Malika Benradi, cited a survey that showed 69 per cent of Europeans equate Islam with violence. Injustice opened the door to fundamentalism, she said, condemning N double standards that imposed sanctions on some groups but not on others.

Egyptian scholar Mahmud Ali Makki said: "We condemn all types of terrorism but we say you cannot fight terrorism through police or military measures. To eliminate terrorism we have to go to the roots. We have to know the problems that generate the fanatic attitudes. Above all, we have to eliminate injustice."

"We have to define terrorism and distinguish between the terrorist who kills innocent people with a bomb in front of a school and those who fight for their independence and their freedom."

PES Group leader in the European Parliament Enrique Baron said: "We are secular parties but in which the values of the Islamic presence enriches us. We can share values of individual progress and social justice in a non-religious movement such as ours is."

He added: "Sharing ideas and objectives with a new view of what freedoms in life in common must be after 11 September, we must not just talk about political and social values. We have to see how we can update and review the Mediterranean process and what we can introduce to overcome the Middle East crisis."

The Winter University continues later today with a session on "Values, rights and freedoms after 11 September."

The concluding session tomorrow will focus on the Middle East crisis and the Barcelona process.



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Subject: Traitor call sparks anger at EU-Muslim talks

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From Tony Robinson, Spokesman, Party of European Socialists  
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'TRAITOR' CALL SPARKS ANGER AT EU-ISLAM TALKS

Fury erupted at talks on EU relations with Islam today after a Tunisian delegate hurled abuse at author Sihem Bemsedrine and denounced her as a traitor.

Ms Bemsedrine had earlier described her country \* 'picture-postcard Tunisia' \* as 'a vast prison for its citizens'. She accused the police of becoming 'more arrogant and repressive' since the US terrorist attacks of 11 September and of mounting attacks on lawyers and the judiciary.

European Parliament Socialist leader Enrique Baron intervened after the outburst by Tunisian official Abdeljelil Messaoudi. Said Mr Baron: 'His behaviour was unacceptable. I told him that I cannot throw him out of the meeting -- but that if he does not like freedom of speech he can leave.'

Earlier, the EU was warned to be more active in building bridges with the Islamic world in order to win the battle against terrorism.

Injustice and inequality were central themes taken up by speakers at a PES Winter University session in Granada, Spain, on 'Values, rights and freedoms after 11 September'.

Madrid University's Professor of Arab World Sociology, Gema Martin Munoz, denounced close Western relations with so-called moderate Islamic regimes that she said were often dictatorships.

Said author Ms Bemsedrine: 'We are struggling for our freedom. We do not understand that Europe on which we build our hopes gives support to dictatorships. The best way to defeat terrorism is to safeguard values of liberty.'

Italian Euro MP Fiorella Ghilardotti pointed out the rich-poor divide between the two sides of the Mediterranean and called for a major review of EU policy in the area.

'The difference between average incomes on the south of the Mediterranean and the EU is in a ratio of one to 12 and in 2010 it will be one to 20,' she said. 'As Europeans, we must do a great deal more. We need to establish a real, far-reaching cultural operation that will increase literacy and spread knowledge of the Arab and Muslim world in Europe.'

Dutch MP Khadija Arib said: 'The world after 11 September is divided into two parts \* Muslim and non-Muslim. In the Arab world there are people fighting terrorism and for human rights \* but we are all put into the same bag now.'

The media, she said, had portrayed the September 11 attacks as 'related to the essence of Islam', describing it as 'a non-civilised religion that instilled violence in its followers.' Meanwhile, young immigrants seeking their identity but failing to find it in Dutch society were turning to extremist groups.

The Winter University, organised by the Party of European Socialists with the European Parliament Socialist Group and the Spanish Socialist Party PSOE, continues tomorrow with a final session on the Middle East crisis and the Barcelona process.