

Rising Islamophobia in Europe a worrying sign

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The American flag being burnt in violent demonstrations in Arab countries is a common sight nowadays. That way, the protests against the US over the movie *Innocence of Muslims* were not surprising. Such countries seem to require the slightest provocation where Uncle Sam is concerned. But a less talked about issue is the worrying rise of Islamophobia in Europe. The latest example is the French satirical publication *Charlie Hebdo*, which has done a series of cartoons on Prophet Mohammed including some even in the nude. The timing is clearly meant to cash in on the controversy raging over the movie as mentioned above. This is not the first time that the weekly has drawn cartoons of the Prophet and previously its office has been firebombed and cases have been filed against it. The management of *Charlie Hebdo* remains unapologetic and frequently cites freedom of speech. This is not France's first controversy with the Muslim world. The 2005 riots had brought up the issue of Muslim youths integrating into French society and nearly 3000 people were arrested in those unrests. In 2004 the hijab was banned and in 2009 the then President Nicolas Sarkozy said that the burqa was "unwelcome" in France.

One country that has curiously been at the centre of it all has been the Netherlands. Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn was assassinated in 2002 for his anti-Islamic views. He called Islam a "backward culture" and wanted to stop Muslim immigration. After his death his party

made its debut in Parliament with a 17% seat share showing how popular he was at that time.

In 2004, Theo van Gogh directed a short movie called *Submission* which tried to highlight the role of women in Islam. While the movie came in for a lot of criticism, van Gogh was assassinated in the same year over the movie.

The movie was written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who remains another controversial figure. A Muslim by birth, today she has emerged as the biggest critic of Islam in recent times. Born in Somalia and brought up in Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kenya, she became a member of Dutch Parliament. She is famous for her book *Infidel* and more recently wrote the controversial *Newsweek* magazine cover story titled "Muslim Rage".

While Fortuyn and van Gogh are no more and Ayaan has left for the US, the current flag of Islamophobia is held by the politician Geert Wilders. He has gone on record saying, "I hate Islam". He has compared the Quran with *Mein Kampf*.

Wilders is known for the controversial short film *Fitna*, which suggests that the Quran has passages of hate within it.

Netherlands was the scene of a photo exhibition by Iranian artist Sooreh Hera. The controversial photograph featured two Iranian gay men wearing masks that depicted Prophet Mohammed and his son-in-law Ali.

The nearby Scandinavian region has also not been spared. Denmark

is famous for the Jyllands-Posten newspaper, which published 12 cartoons of Prophet Muhammad in a full page, many of which were not at all flattering. That led to protests all across Europe. Denmark is also home to the group calling itself “Stop Islamisation of Europe”.

Norway became notorious for Anders Behring Breivik. Breivik called himself a “knight dedicated to stemming the tide of Muslim immigration into Europe” and was involved in the gruesome 2011 attacks where he gunned down 69 people.

Sweden is home to Lars Vilks, who drew the Prophet as a dog in 2007, for which he was assaulted in 2010. He also lives under the shadow of assassination attempts like many others mentioned above. The country houses the Brandenburg Mosque, which has been linked to terrorism.

Germany banned the wearing of head scarves by teachers in schools and universities. The building of the famous Cologne Central Mosque was also targeted by Neo-Nazis and other right-wing groups.

The United Kingdom is home to a sizeable Muslim population and reports say that anti-Muslim hate crimes are on the rise. England was in the news recently when the *BBC* had to pull out its documentary titled *Islam: The Untold Story due to numerous protests by the Muslim population*.

This rising Islamophobia in Europe is a worrying sign, one only hopes that such incidents come down for the sake of world peace.