

# No, Europe Isn't Returning to the Bosom of Islam

The Continent has indeed received millions of migrants, and they pose a variety of problems to their host countries. But these emanate for the most part from right-wing nationalists, not Muslim refugees

[David Stavrou](#) Oct 18, 2018 6:49 PM



Muslim worshippers in a Marseille mosque. Claude Paris / AP

Generally speaking, there are two ways of describing the effects of the changes taking place in the Arab world on Europe: One speaks of millions of immigrants streaming from the rubble of the Middle East and destroying Europe by imposing their primitive, fundamentalist and terrorist culture. A less pessimistic view emphasizes Europe's moral

responsibility to take in refugees from the Middle East, save their lives and give them a new life in free and democratic societies.

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Shaul Mishal's recent piece in this newspaper ("[Europe's Muslim Moment](#)," September 27), belongs to the first type of view, which is held by many people, from academics and journalists to the wider public. You often hear people who had an Arab cabdriver in Paris or saw burka-clad women in Munich saying something like, "The Europeans will be sorry for what they've allowed to happen. Europe will turn into Europistan." These same experts will also classify any other view as the idealistic naiveté of useful idiots in the service of [Islam](#).

Mishal's analysis of the Middle East and Africa is factual and addresses geopolitical fluctuations and climate crises in at least nine countries that are mentioned by name. But when it comes to Europe, Mishal doesn't mention countries, regimes or political entities at all. His Europe is a stereotyped abstraction. What goes for France, goes for Estonia. What goes for Poland, goes for Scotland. Instead of facts and statistics, his analysis of Europe is filled with metaphors and imagery like "waves of immigration flooded Europe" and "Islamic pincers closing in on Europe."

Take the claim that immigration is the cause of the rise of the far right. The far right has gained control in some countries, but in others it is far from having any governmental influence. Where, you might ask, does it have the most power? Actually, in countries like Poland and Hungary, which have taken in hardly any immigrants at all. In Germany and Sweden, which have absorbed large numbers of immigrants, right-wing parties have made gains but they are still far from taking power, with 12.6 percent and 17.5 percent support respectively in the most recent elections.

It's not immigrants that boost the strength of the far right, but the fear of

immigrants. This is an important distinction, one that shows that the solution to extremism and racism isn't necessarily building walls but rather correct absorption and integration policies. The argument that immigrants lead to fascism echoes the argument that the "Jewish problem" ushered in Nazism's rise to power. While there may be a connection, in both cases it is clear that the presence of an ethnic minority is the pretext and not the cause.

Mishal writes about "the return of factionalism, ethnicity and sectionalism," but in Europe's two most important countries, France and Germany, the voters keep electing leaders who support European cooperation and EU institutions. Mishal describes Europe as "a magnet for activity by radical Islamists" and he is right about that: The Middle East is indeed exporting terrorism to Europe. But a broader view shows that in 2017, two-thirds of the terror attacks on the Continent were committed by nationalist and separatist movements and only 16 percent were committed by jihadists. (The remainder were carried out by far-left and far-right organizations.)

It's true that nearly all of those killed in terror attacks in Europe were the victims of jihadist attacks, because these employed methods imported from the Middle East and therefore were deadlier, but ISIS is just the latest addition to the bleak tradition of the Irish, Basque, neo-Nazi, white supremacist and anarchist undergrounds, and as is true for the entire population of Europe, only a tiny percentage of Muslim immigrants empathizes or justifies these attacks.

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Just as the European tradition includes not just Beethoven, Spinoza and Shakespeare but also Auschwitz and the Inquisition, the immigrants also have more than just a single heritage. Millions of Muslims have integrated into European society in the last decades. They have contributed to its economy and its culture and, more important, they have developed a

moderate kind of Islam that in most cases enables them to integrate into Western culture.

Migrant workers from Turkey are not the same as political exiles from Iran or refugees from a murderous civil war in Syria, but it can be said that the majority of Muslims in Europe are secular or traditional. If we hear about radical imams and people volunteering to join ISIS, it's because they're the ones who make headlines. In the real world, no "European countdown" has begun. Yes, a struggle over the Continent's future is underway, but it is not a fight between immigrants seeking to impose sharia law and helpless natives, but one between liberal, democratic trends and separatist, nationalist and racist trends among both immigrants and the societies that are taking them in.

And the fight is far from being lost. National authorities are learning how to combat radicalization, many countries are adapting their immigration policies and the EU is attempting to balance and regulate the refugees' arrival. The European mainstream still believes in multiculturalism, solidarity and democracy, but these are troublesome times and they come with challenges on many fronts. In Germany, Chancellor Merkel is contending with an opposition that decries her immigration policy; in Britain, the Euro-skeptics have prevailed; the Italians took a dramatic turn to the right; and in Spain, the Catalans are threatening to break up the kingdom.

Europe is not "in the process of returning to the bosom of Islam," as Mishal says. Like the rest of the world, it is in the midst of a struggle between populist separatists and the old postwar establishment. And no one, including Israeli prophets of doom, knows how it will end.

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