

Theological Approach is Inevitable in Discussion about Islam and Europe

Brussels

February 2013

"We are seen as arrogance if we expect the fully transformation of Muslim community in Europe to be like us (Europeans)," stressed Prof. Dr. Christine Schirmacher, an Islamic scholar from the University Bonn/Evangelical Theological Faculty of Leuven, on a conference titled "Islam and Europe: Politicization and Integration?" which was organized by the Hans Seidel Stiftung in Goethe-Institute, Brussels, on February 26, 2013. Furthermore, she stated that it's about the time that European people are ready to discuss with the Muslim community within the framework of theological approach, instead of secularism approach.



Her statement was echoed by Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia H.E. Arif Havas Oegroseno. "Indonesia's experience proves that moderate values which are voiced by moderate Muslim leaders, including academicians and NGOs, in Indonesia greatly contribute to the counter-radicalism in Indonesia," he explained, at the same time showing a book titled "The Illusion of an Islamic State" published by the Wahid Institute, LibForAll Foundation and Maarif

Institute. The book was a result of a research conducted by leading think-tanks in Indonesia and abroad which promote academic and theological aspects. Ambassador Oegroseno further explained that Indonesia's ability to overcome the political and economic crisis in a relatively short time, and with Indonesia's stature today, have proven that Islam is compatible with modernization, democracy and human rights.

The conference was attended by hundreds of participants, including academicians, think-tanks and representatives of the European Union's institutions engaged in politics, defense and security, as well as human rights. Other speakers included Prof. Dr. Michael Kohler from the European Commission and Ms. Malika Hamidi, General Manager of the European Muslim Network. Dr. Christian Gsdann of the Committee of the Regions was the moderator of the discussions.

Ms. Malika Hamidi assessed that Europe in general emphasizes only on the the negative side of Muslims in Europe. She urged that it is about the time for the people in Europe to see that the contribution of Muslims in Europe is real and significant. "This situation occurs because the media anywhere have never keen to observe the positive development," stated Ms. Hamidi, illustrating that campaigns carried by the European Muslim Network are rarely covered by the media in Europe.

Prof. Dr. Michael Kohler asserted that Muslims in Europe have created fears for the European society in the EU although there are only 19 million Muslims or less than 4% of the EU population of over 500 million. The democratic transformation in neighboring countries such as Tunisia has also created public concern on the emergence of a political party that is based on militant or radical Islam which consequently will affect Europe.

"The existence of hundreds of religious harmony forum consisting of religious leaders in every corner of Indonesia, as well as 2 (two) Islamic organizations NU and Muhammadiyah, is the characteristic of Muslim community which exists only in Indonesia. It proves to have a positive impact on Indonesia's efforts to maintain religious harmony in Indonesia," highlighted Ambassador Oegroseno. However, he acknowledged that, as in other diverse countries in the world, Indonesia is not completely spared from the challenges of interreligious and intercultural harmony in society. The era of globalization of information and communication technologies presents Indonesia with even greater challenge.

In addition to a better understanding of fundamental problems faced by Muslim communities in the European Union, i.e. the issue of immigration, adaptation to social, economic and cultural gaps, the conference was concluded by emphasizing the need for dialogue with the Muslim community carried out by Islamic religious leaders who are able to promote the moderate Islam values. The dialogue is expected to counteract radicalism and creating a sense of mutual understanding and respect amongst religious communities. [Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, Brussels]

<http://www.embassyofindonesia.eu/?q=node/221>