



AN OPEN LETTER TO SWISS CITIZENS AND TO THOSE WHO PRAISE THEM EXCESSIVELY FOR THE VOTE ON MINARETS

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Dear Friends,

I have the feeling that I am about to say something you will find painful. And that I am going to disappoint the many of you who, since 29 November, have asked me to comment about the referendum on minarets. But so be it. Friendship and the truth always require that you say what you think.

Dear Swiss friends, **the referendum in which 57.5% of you came out against the construction of minarets in your country was useless, counter-productive, stupid, dangerous and immoral.**

Are you still listening? So you haven't switched off yet? Then let's take things one by one, in proper order.

This referendum was useless, because the issue of minarets is a phony problem. As the Imam of Bordeaux, Tareq Oubrou, has stressed, what is at issue is not an obligation set down by the Quran but a piece of 'traditional architecture.' It is not a political symbol. There is no indication that minarets are about to spring up like mushrooms in your country, and if that were the case some simple town planning regulations would suffice to settle the matter.

It was stupid and counter-productive, because you have turned a 'non-issue' into a crucial one, a focal point for grievances, just as others did a few years ago with their caricatures of the prophet (on that matter I have always said the same thing and I have not changed my mind: one must have the right to make caricatures of the prophet, Christ, Iahve or Vishnu, but that I, for one, will not do so...). By focusing on a point which simply emerges from customs and traditions, you have given arguments to those who shout about 'Islamophobia' from the rooftops. Now they will have one more argument for their claims that any criticism of religion is a form of rejection and of racism.

It was dangerous, because you are giving the impression that you reject Muslims and Islam in general and not just fundamentalism and Islamism. In addition, by attacking this 'non-problem,' you are not isolating the extremists and reducing the tension, as you may believe, but instead are exacerbating tensions and you are pushing many European Muslims to make common cause to defend themselves against what they might consider to be an aggression.

Finally, it was immoral, because any intrusion into private life and religious practices is unjustified if it is not based on reasons of public order. And in what way do some minarets threaten public order?

Is there an Islamist danger in Europe? Yes, of course. And having been myself the victim of a serious physical attack for having defended the ban on the veil, I think I have the full right to speak out on this issue. Indeed, there is in certain milieus linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and having great influence over young people, a concerted plan aimed at digging a trench between the communities and imposing Sharia law in public life. In addition, in the name of 'protecting freedom of thought,' Europe today is exporting radicalism towards the countries of origin of the Muslims living on their own soil. In (nearly) every terrorist network that has been dismantled in Morocco these past few years, you find converts and Muslims born and educated in Europe. This is not an accident but the fruit of our errors and of our weakness. This poses real dangers which must be fully addressed and fought.

Do we have a problem with Islam? As a religion, no; but with respect to certain of its practices, yes, of course. This is particularly the case for polygamy, which is forbidden by the law but tolerated in fact everywhere in Europe. It is the case with ritual slaughter and the useless and shocking suffering imposed on the animals which undergo it. Here we see real problems which must be settled.

But in order to fight against extremism, in order to reform some practices which arise from religion – or rather from a retrograde and archaic vision of this religion – which have no place in Europe, we need the support of European Muslims and the assistance from their countries of origin like, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria. We will not win this battle for hearts and minds by stigmatizing and rejecting an entire community as you have done.

For my part, **I prefer a thousand times more to see mosques decorated with minarets where they teach an Islam of peace and tolerance than to see obscure and dark rooms where people practice unhealthy, obscurantist and unstructured religion and where an Islamist ideology and its corollaries are developing in Europe today: with calls for hatred and Jihad.**

One further word addressed to those living outside Switzerland who decided to praise the 'courage' of the Swiss in this sad affair.

I know Switzerland very well. Twenty years ago, I had the pleasure of working there for the major media of Geneva and Lausanne: '24 heures,' 'La Tribune de Genève' and TSR. I enjoyed the contacts I had with colleagues who were open to the world, kind and tolerant.

But your referendum today reminds me not of that Switzerland but of another one, one which is detestable and which those who congratulate you on your choice curiously try to forget today.

That is the Switzerland which closed its borders to Jewish and anti-fascist refugees during the Second World War (or handed them over to barbarism) and which money-laundered and recycled Nazi money during the same period, thereby earning the name of 'Bankers of the Third Reich.' The Switzerland of these same bankers which demanded of the heirs of Jewish depositors that they provide death certificates of relatives who died in Auschwitz – 'You don't have this document? What a pity, because we are obliged to keep your money.' A Switzerland which, between 1934 and...1975 (!) used force to pull hundreds of children from their families in the Jenisch (Gypsy) community and made them undergo terrible physical cruelty in its 'social services.' A Switzerland which, in the end, does not like foreigners but which over the course of several decades has built a formidable machine to

launder and provide shelter for the money of all the mafias and all the dictators of the world.

Dear friends, let us be perfectly clear: is this the Switzerland with which you declare your solidarity today?

In order to teach lessons on morality and tolerance, dear Swiss friends, you need to have the means. With regard to your history and the obvious difficulty you have to prove such means, it seems to me that unfortunately this does not apply in your case.

Please be assured, my dear Swiss friends, that you enjoy my disappointed but attentive sentiments.

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