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## Press Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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### Muslim-State Relations in 21st-Century Europe: Recommendations for Successful Dialogue

Two years after urban riots roiled France — and as the European Union’s Year of Intercultural Dialogue approaches in 2008 — a new report provides a roadmap for how European governments can best engage Muslim communities on issues related to religious practice and integration.

Islam is Europe’s second largest religion, with at least 15 million Muslims now residing in Europe. In several European cities, the Muslim population exceeds 20 percent. Following current trends, the numbers of Muslims in Europe will continue to grow absolutely and as a proportion of the population.

The primary challenges for European governments are to safeguard religious freedoms and to ensure a voice for Muslim populations, while combating extremism and adapting European societies to diverse religious communities.

In *Integrating Islam: A New Chapter in “Church-State” Relations*, Jonathan Laurence, a professor at Boston College, draws on examples from throughout the European Union to provide a framework for establishing dialogues or interreligious councils. Dr. Laurence argues that these councils should not attempt to replace political processes or representation; rather, they should focus on practical matters where public policy and religious practice intersect, such as securing land to build mosques and appointing Muslim chaplains to hospitals and prisons. In doing so, councils can play a critical role in integrating newcomers of various faiths, many of whom still have foreign nationality.

Dr. Laurence recommends including representatives of the three main “viewpoints” of Muslim civil society:

- members of organizations that enjoy close relationships with sending countries;
- Islamist activists who obey the law and are open to dialogue with people from different origins and perspectives; and
- individual experts from within EU Member States, particularly “minorities within the minority,” such as women and young people.

Dr. Laurence also recommends guidelines for structuring dialogues based on best practices:

1. Governments must establish a clear purpose for the dialogue based on the understanding that respect for the rule of law is a precondition for participation.
2. Working groups should set pragmatic agendas for concrete accomplishments, such as coordinating the observance of religious holidays.
3. Governments should consider ways to institutionalize groups so they are permanent structures, based on a case-by-case evaluation of the consultations’ success.
4. It is essential to balance local dialogues, which are more effective in addressing challenges of practicing the Muslim faith and clashes between faith communities, and national dialogues, which can better tackle national regulatory issues.

Looking to the future of these dialogues, Dr. Laurence notes that EU Member State governments will have primary responsibility for dialogues with Muslim communities, but, once effective structures are in place, a meaningful European superstructure may be possible.

The report, which includes case studies of effective consultative bodies in EU Member States, is [available online](#).

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