SADIQ KHAN: FIRST MUSLIM MAYOR OF LONDON

London's new mayor, Sadiq Khan, has said he will "put London first" as he looked to move on from the divisive campaign run by his rival Zac Goldsmith. At his signing-in ceremony at Southwark Cathedral, backed by a secular choir, the Labour mayor said he wanted the moment to herald the start of a City Hall run for all Londoners and all communities. “I’m hoping the result on Thursday encourages young people to get involved in mainstream politics, encourages Londoners of Islamic faith and other minority communities, encourages British Muslims and others to get involved in civic society and get involved in mainstream politics,” he said. “The decency of Londoners, the decency of British people will always cut through.” (The Guardian)

Who is Sadiq Khan?
Sadiq Khan, a 45-year-old Labour politician, is the first Muslim to be elected mayor of a major European city and has become a key new face of the ‘Islam vs. the West’ debate. The son of Pakistani immigrants, he grew up in a south London housing estate and his father worked as a bus driver. Before entering politics, Khan worked as a human rights lawyer; in 2009, he was appointed as Transport Minister in Gordon Brown’s government; and he managed Ed Miliband’s successful campaign to become the Labour leader. In his public dealings, he has been open about his Muslim faith – hefasts, goes to a mosque, and has been on hajj to Mecca. Yet he is also a liberal, and voted in favour of gay marriage rights.

Some say that Khan’s faith is of no relevance in multicultural London, while his opponents (in the run-up to the elections) made a big deal of his past connections to recognised Muslim extremists. In the wake of his victory, the debates continue.

Debated extremist ties
Maajid Nawaz (British activist, author and politician, and co-founder of the Quilliam ‘counter-extremism think tank’) says that Khan is a “liberal Muslim”, not the extremist that his Conservative electoral opponent made him out to be. However, Nawaz says that Khan “has a record of terribly poor judgement in surrounding himself with Islamists and Muslim extremists, and in using them for votes”. According to Nawaz, Khan appeared at a 2003 conference alongside Sajeel Abu Ibrahim, who belonged to a now-banned terrorist group and ran a camp in Pakistan that trained one of the bombers responsible for the 2005 London attacks. In 2004, Khan was serving as chair of the Muslim Council of Britain’s legal affairs committee and argued in Parliament that Muslim Brotherhood cleric (and recognised extremist) Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradawi was not as radical as was claimed. Khan also attended events organised by the ‘jihadist rights group’ Cage, which has since described Islamic State executioner ‘Jihadi John’ as a “beautiful man”.

Nawaz sees these connections as attempts by Khan to gain political support, rather than indications of any extremist leanings in Khan himself. He also highlights the fact that Muslim extremists, including Khan’s “old friends”, are denouncing Khan for his “traitorous” stance on gay marriage, feminism and Israeli relations (Khan’s first act as mayor of London was to attend a Holocaust memorial service). Some death threats made against Khan have already been reported.

An example of integration?
A word that comes up regularly in analyses of Khan’s election is “integration”. Nawaz believes that Khan’s victory “speaks to the possibilities of integration”. Roger Cohen, writing for the New York Times, says that “the world of the 21st century is going to be shaped by such... many-faceted identities [like Khan] and by the booming cities that celebrate diversity”, and that Khan “represents currents in the world – toward global identity and integration”. George Eaton, in The
**NEWS HEADLINES**

The 50th anniversary of the start of China's Cultural Revolution passed without fanfare, almost completely ignored by the Communist Party-controlled media. No official events were being held on Monday (26 May) to commemorate the anniversary of the decade-old revolution that historians say may have killed more than 1.5 million people.

The United States switched on an $800 million missile shield in Romania that it sees as vital to defend itself and Europe from so-called rogue states but the Kremlin says is aimed at blunting its own nuclear arsenal. The full shield also includes ships and radars across Europe. It will be handed over to NATO in July, with command and control run from a US air base in Germany. Russia is incensed at such a show of force by its Cold War rival in formerly communist-ruled Eastern Europe.

**FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

There are three key points for Christians to keep in mind regarding Sadiq Khan’s election and the big picture.

Firstly, London is a highly diverse and multicultural city where religious affiliations have come to mean little, and most voters would have been more interested in Khan’s public transport policies than his Islamic beliefs. However, Khan’s religious affiliation is extremely relevant to today’s political and spiritual world. He may not intend to lead London from an Islamic platform, but the fact that he is a high-profile Muslim will have ripple effects. Many non-Muslims may begin basing their understanding of Islam on what Khan portrays (an Islam compatible with Western morality), while more radical Muslims are likely to be ever-more offended by his liberalism.

Secondly, Sadiq Khan’s insistence that the London elections are proof that Western liberal values are compatible with mainstream Islam should not lull Christians into a false sense of complacency. Western liberal values are not necessarily Christian values, and Khan’s values do not fully reflect the Islam of the Quran. Christian and Islamic beliefs continue to “clash” at their cores, and there is still much work for the Church to do among people of all faith backgrounds. Unless the Church actively maintains its visibility, relevance and value (especially to non-Christians) in society, it will continue to lose its voice and influence even further.

Thirdly, fears about “Londonistan” and “Eurabia” are no reason for Christians to isolate themselves from the growing Muslim population in the West. Bagehot writes that “in some corners of Britain, Muslims are dangerously cut-off and not like [Sadiq Khan] at all”, and Khan has said in the past that “too many British Muslims grow up without really knowing anyone from a different background”. This should be a wakeup call for all Christians in the West, not just in Britain. How can we hope that Muslims come to faith in Jesus if they never really know someone who believes in and follows Him? Mehdi Hassan, in an article for the New York Times, wrote the following: “The more you demonise Islam and Muslims, and the more Muslims are treated as ‘them’ and not ‘us’, the more you push people apart. Fear and loathing is not a strategy for integration.” While Hassan (and much of the Western world) focuses on integration from a secular perspective, his words are true for Christianity as well: fear and loathing is not a strategy for displaying Christ’s love to the nations.

**PRAY >** For God to work in the heart of Sadiq Khan, drawing him to the truth > For the Western Church to engage with Muslims in a Godly manner > For the UK Church to grow in influence

**TURKEY AND THE EU’S COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP**

**Continued struggles for Merkel**

In 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel was widely praised for her leadership in the midst of the EU’s immigrant/refugee crisis. International media lauded her ‘open door’ policies implemented in Germany, which received the majority of those seeking refuge from the war in Syria and the brutality of the Islamic State in Iraq.

However, 2016 saw increased opposition to Ms Merkel’s policies, with anti-immigration groups like PEGIDA renewing their efforts and organising mass protests against what they see as the ‘Islamisation’ of Europe through the large-scale immigration from Muslim countries.

In reality, only 22 percent of the more than 6 million refugees who fled the Middle East since the start of the civil war in Syria (2011) and the violent advance of the Islamic State (2014) have entered Europe. Most

German politicians accused Chancellor Angela Merkel at the weekend of making Europe overly dependent on Turkey in the migrant crisis, leaving the bloc vulnerable to blackmail by President Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey, refusing to bow to European Union demands to rein in its anti-terrorism laws, said on Friday that talks on a deal to provide visa-free travel in return for stopping illegal migrants reaching the EU had reached an impasse and the bloc must find a “new formula” to salvage the agreement. (Reuters)
Muslim refugees have sought safety in neighbouring countries: Jordan (hosting more than 600,000 refugees), Lebanon (more than a million) and Turkey (more than 2 million).

Of the 1.3 million refugees seeking asylum in the EU in 2015, only 292,540 applications were approved (of which Germany received the most). And as the EU attempts to agree on a deal with Turkey – for the Turkish government to stop the flow of refugees to the EU and to take back those denied asylum in Europe – Angela Merkel is facing even more criticism. According to a recent INSA poll, almost half of Germany's population does not want Ms Merkel to stay in office after completing her current term.

**Turkey and the EU**

For years, Turkey has coveted EU membership. But this has not been granted, due to Turkey's human rights abuses and its broad anti-terror laws, which have made the country 'dangerous' to the EU.

However, March 2016 marked a turning point in the process, with the new EU refugee deal opening the possibility for Turkey's eventual inclusion in the EU. According to BBC News, "migrants arriving in Greece are now expected to be sent back to Turkey if they do not apply for asylum or their claim is rejected." Another part of the deal is that for every illegal Syrian immigrant sent back to Turkey, one Syrian who has obtained legal asylum status via Turkey will be resettled in the EU.

One of the primary benefits for Turkey gained by the deal is the possibility of visa-free travel for Turkish citizens in EU countries, following Turkey's implementation of a list of 72 criteria. But on 13 May, Turkey said that they would not bow to European demands, and has, in effect, stepped away from the previous agreements made.

This has opened Angela Merkel to further opposition at home, with people claiming that in her efforts to ease the refugee crisis, she has left the EU vulnerable to 'blackmail' by Turkey. Many are fearing that the EU's hand may end up being forced, allowing Turkey to join the EU without amending its human rights laws.

**FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Turkey is a unique country, forming a geographical link between 'Christian' Europe and the Muslim Middle East. For many years, this has provided a strategic platform for Christian missionaries, who have used the country as a 'gateway' into the Muslim world. Likewise, the reverse is also true for Muslims, who can enter Europe more easily via Turkey.

Turkey's official religious demography shows the country to be 99.8 percent Muslim, but a 2012 Gallup report found that 73 percent of Turkish citizens identify as "not religious". Wanting to be secular and more 'European', many Turks protested the building of a new mosque in a public square in the capital (Ankara) in 2013. Sponsored by the government, the new mosque became a symbol of what protestors saw as the government's 'forced Islamisation' of the country and generated widespread civil unrest.

From the Turkish (secular) side, visa-free travel could be a means of expanding economic trade into the EU, but from the EU side, there are fears that Turkey's possible membership could make it easier for radicalised Muslims to enter Europe, leaving the continent further exposed to terror attacks.

Over the past century, the Turkish Christian population has dropped from 22 percent to 0.21 percent (2016 figures). So while EU analysts are asking whether a Turkish EU membership could eventually lead to the 'Islamisation of Europe', mission strategists are considering the possible benefits for Christianity in Turkey itself.

Throughout Europe (and especially in Germany), churches have started responding to the immense challenge and opportunity created by the many Muslims entering the region. With an estimated 60,000 Christian refugees entering among every thousand, churches have recognised the need to connect with these believers who know the language and culture of the refugee population, employing them to help reach their Muslim counterparts.

If the Church stops these kinds of initiatives, focusing instead on fears and personal interests, the concept of a 'Muslim Europe' becomes more of a possibility.

**PRAY**

- For God to guide world leaders as they made decisions about refugees
- For agreements with Turkey to open doors for Christian outreach
- For Angela Merkel's EU leadership

**ALEPPO IS BURNING**

T he Syrian conflict is "in many ways out of control and deeply disturbing", said the US secretary of state, John Kerry, in early May, as he attempted to salvage a two-month-old fragile truce that was collapsing. Aleppo is one battleground of many, in a seemingly endless war of attrition; and yet the fate of a nation could hinge on this city. Aleppo is a key centre for the anti-Assad groups that are meant to be part of the UN-negotiated settlement, if that ever materialises. Aleppo is also a strategic location, close to the border with Turkey, which has acted as a lifeline for supplies and refugee movements. Some believe that if Aleppo falls, all hopes for a genuine peace negotiation will be crushed. (The Guardian)

**Ancient significance, current crisis**

Until recently, Aleppo was the most populous city in Syria and an important economic hub for the country. Its significance dates back to ancient times (it was a...
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**Knowledge to Action**

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