# CALL TO EUROPE V
# "ISLAM IN EUROPE":
## Brussels, 24th- 25th June 2015

**Massimo D'Alema**
President of FEPS

Dear friends, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the fifth edition of FEPS' annual conference Call to Europe. I thank you all for being here, but let me address special thanks to the personalities of different religions, intellectuals, representatives of the academic world and politicians that are here today in order to share with us their views on the this year topic, "Islam in Europe".

My hope is that this conference will not represent an end in itself, but rather be the starting point of a dialogue with our European Muslim fellow-citizens. Altogether we are talking of more than 20 million people in the European Union. People coming from different parts of the world. But also people who were born in Europe. Second or third generation immigrants. Others are recent immigrants who live and work in the EU without being European citizens yet.

As we all know, there is not a European Islam. Nor can we talk of a German Islam or a French one. There is a plurality of communities across our continent, which are built around cultural and religious centres and more often make reference to the country of origin.

Equally different are the rules that in the member states regulate religious freedom and the integration of the Islamic communities in our societies.

Our aim today is to go deeper, to better understand how these European citizens and inhabitants live together with the other Europeans, how their principles and values coexist with the principles and values on which the European Union has been built and which underpin our own cohabitation.

The goal of this reflection, which I would like to turn into a permanent forum, is to promote a better quality of our living together on the base of a better mutual knowledge.

I am deeply convinced, and I am sure that many in this room share my views, that Islam and European values, such as freedom and democracy, respect for human and civil rights, can live together. However, today this certainty is called into question and is under attack at least from two fronts.

On the one hand, from religious fundamentalism, which in its more extreme forms preaches and carries out the jihad against the Western world – from Judaism to Christianity, with its secular traditions. And on the other hand, from an ethnocentric refusal, permeated by racism, of Islam. A sort of Islamophobia.

Both these trends risk tearing apart our societies and, on a global scale, epitomize the danger of a clash of civilisations, which after the end of the Cold War represent today the greatest threat to peace and security.

I would like to underline, however, that we do not wish to discuss foreign policy here. We are not going to analyse the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, or the expansion of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, albeit we recognise how important these developments are for own security and for the stability and prosperity of those regions.

The goal of this conference today is to discuss what is going on within Europe, in our societies.

The economic crisis and its consequences, such as the serious level of unemployment and social exclusion, have exacerbated the risk of social tensions and conflicts among our own communities.

Moreover, we know that cultural and religious motivations can lead to choices and paths that to us may appear unintelligible and shocking. What does lead a youth, born, raised and educated in Europe, to become an Islamic State fighter, engage in a war and a foreign cause that should not be his own, behead his peers or innocent civilians, risk his own life in a faraway country or in a terrorist attack within the borders of Europe?

Let me make a few clarifications. When tackling the issue of radicalisation, we should first remember two simple facts. Radicalization and religious fundamentalism in particular are not new phenomena. And they are not just an Islamic prerogative.

A Middle East and Islamic affairs scholar has written: "When people feel vulnerable, economically and politically insecure, confused about the world and the society they live in, and they are seeking a guidance to help navigate themselves and their families through troubled social conditions, this is when you see an upsurge of religious fundamentalism" [Nader Hashemi, University of Denver].

We can meet these conditions in vulnerable or distressed societies all over the world. Not just in the Arab and Islamic countries. As I mentioned, this is currently the case also in an economically worn out European Union.

Also, let's not forget that even the United States in the last fifteen years has experienced a wave of religious fundamentalism – Christian fundamentalism – with the Neocon movement, which thrived in a moment when the US felt more than ever threatened.

Or let's think of the growing weight that extremist religious parties have recently gained in Israel, a country which – whether right or wrong, and whatever we may think about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict – has been suffering for decades of a sort of "encirclement syndrome".

I am afraid that no religion can be considered free from the danger of radicalisation. In periods of crisis, in populations that suffer the horror of war, persecutions or human rights abuses this risk increases. As we are unfortunately witnessing in Iraq, Syria and Libya.

To this element we shall add another factor which is a unique expression of the era we live in. That is, the impact that globalisation has on the feeling of belonging. Belonging to a place, a community, a nation, a culture, a social or a religious group in a more and more fast-forward world. The result is a form of nihilism and an identity crisis, or maybe an identity conflict for which there are no easy solutions.

What came as a wet blanket for Western countries in the last decade is the discovery that the threat of Islamic radicalisation can grow within their borders, on their land, among their kids: second, third, even fourth generation youth of Muslim origins and converts in search of a badge of cultural identity and of a cause to die for.

Plenty of studies are being carried on to comprehend the roots of this phenomenon, the reasons why North American and European youths are willing to leave their more or less comfortable existences, to fight and risk their lives in Syria and Iraq, and the means that are used by terrorist organisations to recruit them, the radicalisation mechanisms that turn them in the so-called foreign fighters.

Most analyses highlight the fact that there is a generational component. That most potential recruits are those who are in a stage of their lives in which the search for an identity, for the approval of peers, and the group dynamics are extremely important.

Another component that is emerging is that many of these radical extremists have no deep knowledge of Islam and find comfort in simplistic ideologies and political platforms, in which there is nothing between black and white, right and wrong, with little room for nuances, for pluralism, either religious or political.

Very often these radicals are not the result of preaching in mosques, as it is erroneously believed. Rather they become radicalised on the internet, through social networks, where they get in contact with all sorts of preachers or extremist groups that provide them with a "struggle for justice" to engage in, in order to escape from their personal resentments.

This is not the place to discuss the origins of this trend. But the implications of this phenomenon ought to make us reflect, on the one hand, on our models of integration, whose limits have been clearly exposed, and, on the other, on our social inclusion policies, because it is a fact, as I already mentioned, that home grown terrorism finds roots easily among people that feel disenfranchised in societies and countries that they think have failed them. At the same time, as Olivier Roy said, we shall "deflate the attractive image of jihad".

These phenomena of radicalisation that emerge within the Islamic community in Europe cannot be understood if we do not consider the consequences that the economic, social, political and cultural crises have produced in European societies.

This drive, this appeal to our own identity does not concern exclusively the Islamic world. It is rather a reaction to the uncertainties and the risk of homologation that come together with the process of globalization. It is a reaction to what the great European philosopher Zygmunt Bauman calls "liquid society". The return to nationalisms, to localism, the reappearance of totalitarian ideologies, which we believed to have been buried by history, are alarming phenomena that involve several European countries.

It is not a case that they manifest themselves together with new worrisome forms of anti-Semitism and, more generally, of islamophobia that, in turn, produce episodes of violence, aggression and brutality against migrants and minorities.

It looks like xenophobia and racism are back in Europe, fueling the treacherous idea that the European Union could close its external frontiers in order to become a sort of fortress apart from the rest of the world.

By contrast, migration flows cannot be stopped but need be governed, keeping into due consideration the social and cultural impact that they might have in a moment of crisis, such as the one we are experiencing.

And such regressive ideas are dangerous and deceptive. The future of Europe is today more than ever to become a multiethnic, multi-religious, multilingual society. Therefore we cannot avoid the challenge of learning to live together.

If the European Union will not be able to prevent and tackle such threat to peaceful cohabitation, we risk the very survival of our heritage of values and culture. We risk calling into question the very existence of the European project.

Today, we shall look for viable strategies to avoid such an outcome. In my view, such a strategy shall have a multifaceted approach, because a merely security-oriented line of action is doomed to failure.

This is not because we are not interested in security, but because it is clear that integration and education are necessary conditions for guaranteeing efficiently more security.

We need political actions aiming at social inclusion, at education, at involving not only the institution but at mobilizing civil society, representatives of the religious world. Only a convergent commitment of all these forces, institutions and people can help us face such a complex challenge.

To this aim, I propose the establishment of an observatory on immigrants' integration policies across Europe. Such an observatory might be constituted by the European Parliament not only with the goal of identifying difficulties faced by member states, but only of disseminating the best practices, that are usually neglected by the media.

For all these reasons, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies decided to promote this conference, which has been thought not as a mere political meeting, but as an opportunity for a broad dialogue involving representatives with different backgrounds and approaches. And for all these reasons, it is our goal to keep working in this direction.

The great challenge is to learn to live together, crushing any feeling of fear and trying to understand and appraising the truths that are part of the cultures and religions of the others. We shall not forget that the European Union was born to let peoples who had been fighting each other in two world wars live together in peace. And it succeeded. This is why I am strongly convinced that we will win today's challenge as well.