Dutch Muslim Parties: A New Development in Islamization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The emergence of Muslim political parties in the Netherlands is a new facet of Islamization. One of these parties, Denk, has three seats in parliament and is also represented at the local level, as are other Muslim parties. They usually oppose integration and do not accept Dutch culture as the country’s dominant culture. Anti-Semitism is a regular attribute, often disguised as hate speech against Israel.

New facets of Islamization keep emerging in Western Europe. An important one is the emergence of Muslim political parties, a development that has occurred primarily in the Netherlands so far. These parties exist on both the local and national levels. While identity politics in the Netherlands has greatly decreased, the full impact of this new development is not yet understood.

The main Muslim party in the Netherlands is called Denk (Think). It came into being after two Turkish-born parliamentarians, Tunahan Kuzu and Selçuk Öztürk, were expelled from the Labour (PvdA) faction at the end of 2014. They had opposed the integration policy for immigrants of then PvdA Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher. Shortly before his expulsion from the party, Öztürk said to Ahmed Marcouch, another Labour Muslim parliamentarian, “May Allah punish you.”

As long as Kuzu and Öztürk represented Labour, they could not speak outside their assigned areas of competence; nor could they make statements contradicting the party line. Now that they have their own party, they are free to take far more radical positions.

In the 2017 parliamentary elections, Denk won three seats of a total 150. Besides Kuzu and Öztürk, the Moroccan Farid Azarkan was also elected. An estimated 1.2 million Muslims live in the Netherlands, of whom 500,000 are Turks and 400,000 are...
Moroccans. Recent polls indicate that if elections were held now, Denk would increase its number of seats.

Many Turks hold dual Dutch and Turkish nationality, and 115,000 Turks in the Netherlands voted in the 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum. Of these, 71% backed Erdoğan’s proposal. About the same number of voters participated in the 2018 Turkish parliamentary elections. Of these, 62% voted for Erdoğan’s AKP. In Turkey, that party received 53% of the vote.

There are several other Muslim parliamentarians in the established Dutch parties, but Kuzu and Öztürk are viewed as the only loyal Erdoğan supporters in the Dutch parliament. This is worthy of note, as under Erdoğan’s presidency the democratic character of Turkey has been greatly eroded.

Denk participated in the 2018 municipal elections, where it won council seats in 13 out of the 14 municipalities where it had candidates – mainly in larger cities. Several other Muslim parties gained seats in municipal councils, such as in Rotterdam and The Hague.

The Denk program is a lengthy document. It doesn’t accept Dutch culture as the dominant culture of the Netherlands. It states that not only do the immigrants have to listen to the Dutch, but also the reverse. One example of such a statement goes as follows: “When I think about the Netherlands I dream about a healthy Netherlands where Nurse Thea takes into account the desires and demands of Aunt Latifa.” This could include discriminatory attitudes. For instance, a Muslim woman may refuse to be treated by a male doctor. A Muslim may also be an anti-Semite who doesn’t want to be attended by a Jewish nurse. Both scenarios have occurred.

So far, elected representatives of Muslim parties have not been part of ruling municipal coalitions. In Rotterdam before the 2018 municipal elections, three left-wing parties – PvdA, Green Left (GL), and the Socialist Party (SP) – intended to cooperate with the Muslim party Nida. It then became known that Nida had called Israel a terror state in 2014 and would not refute this. PvdA and GL backed out of the agreement, but SP remained.

Muslim parties’ attitudes towards Israel and Jews are often hostile. Earlier this year, almost all parties in the Amsterdam municipal council signed, at the request of the Jewish community, a document entitled the "Amsterdam Jewish Accord." It states that Jews have a right to security paid for by the city government, that anti-Semitism needs to be fought, and that the Jewish elements of Amsterdam’s history should be taught to the general population. Two parties refused to sign the agreement: Denk and BIJ1, a party comprised mainly of black immigrants. A candidate in the Amsterdam elections claimed on behalf of Denk that Israel and the West had played a role in establishing ISIS.
The pro-Israel organization CIDI has stated that Denk’s parliamentary questions and promotion on Facebook are riddled with anti-Semitic symbols, suggestions, and insinuations, hidden as criticism of Israel.

Some representatives of other Muslim parties make extreme anti-Semitic remarks. In The Hague, a Dutch councilman who converted to Islam, Arnoud van Doorn, blamed Zionism for the failed 2016 coup in Turkey. On May 4, National Memorial Day, when the more than 100,000 Dutch Jews murdered in the Holocaust were remembered, he said the Palestinians were equal to the victims of the Holocaust. He has also tweeted, “May Allah exterminate the Zionists.”

Last year Israeli schoolchildren visited the Dutch parliament. Another Muslim council member in The Hague, Abdoe Khoulani, called the students “Zionist terrorists in training” and “future child murderers and occupiers.” A Dutch judge dismissed a court case against Khoulani, saying his remarks did not constitute incitement to hate.

Belgium is another country where Muslims are politically organized, though on a much smaller scale. The Islam party has two representatives in municipal councils. Its program includes the introduction of sharia and a 100% Islamic state in Belgium. The party also promotes separation between men and women on public transport. Islam has announced that it will contest 28 municipalities in the October elections. If the phenomenon of Muslim parties spreads elsewhere in Western Europe, incitement and societal tensions are likely to increase further.

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