

## **The Danish Cartoon Controversy**

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In September 2005, *Jyllands-Posten*, a conservative Danish newspaper with a circulation of 175,000, provocatively solicited and published twelve caricatures of the prophet Mohammed. When the paper and the Danish government refused to apologize, a group of Danish *immans* traveled to Saudi Arabia and Egypt with pictures of the ‘blasphemous’ cartoons. The rest of the story is well known: violent protests in the Middle East have left dozens dead; protesters in London have been urged Muslims to ‘Butcher those who Mock Islam.’ Laid against these dramatic images have been peaceful protests, and a profound sense of offence among large numbers of Europe’s Muslim communities.

The paper reflects on the implications of the Danish cartoon controversy for the incorporation of Europe’s Muslim population. It rejects the argument, made most recently by Tariq Modood, that Europe has to decide which is more important, the right to ridicule Muslims or the integration of them. It is not, the paper argues, Europe that has to choose; it is rather those who wish to restrict free speech, whether they be Muslim or non-Muslim, citizens or non-citizens, recent immigrants or longstanding permanent residents. They have to decide whether they wish to live in a liberal democratic society. If they do, they have to accept that they will hear and see things that offend them, sometimes deeply. They are free to protest them peacefully, but not to demand their criminal sanction. They will hopefully do this in the knowledge that that same liberal democracy sustains many values and practices from which they benefit and that they cherish. In the end, the same liberal democratic values that protect a right to practice one’s religion, to maintain one’s distinctive cultural practices, to be reunited with one’s family through family reunification, protect the right of free speech. It is part of the liberal democratic framework, not a negotiable addition to it.