

Statement of Congressman Robert Wexler
Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats
Hearing on Islamic Extremism
April 27, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today's hearing on Islamic extremism in Europe. I would also like to thank our distinguished guests for joining us today.

Despite significant policy disagreements between the Bush Administration and some European allies surrounding the Iraq War, transatlantic cooperation in the war against terror has deepened, and is certain to grow stronger in the months and years ahead. As shared victims of terror, the United States and Europe must stand united in formulating a joint response.

Events, such as the Madrid bombing; the 2003 suicide bombing in Israel by two British citizens; the 2003 arrest of Richard Reid; and the recent assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, all demonstrate that terrorist organizations in Europe remain active. This has significant implications for America because the most pressing threats from groups like Al Qaeda stem from affiliated organizations in Europe and European individuals, organizations and cells.

European governments must do more to address the alienation of Islamic communities, where over 80 percent of European Muslims feel victimized by discrimination and harassment according to a recent poll. This, in turn, provides fodder to those who exploit Islam to promote their narrow political goals. The result has been increased support for terror, and rising anti-Americanism, anti-Israel sentiment and anti-Semitism in Europe commensurate with ongoing violence in the Middle East.

This is most clear in France – home to Europe's largest Jewish and Muslim populations – where Islamic extremism has been cited as a root cause of increased anti-Semitism in the past five years. I have previously commended the French for steps taken to curb anti-Semitic hate crimes, though I am deeply concerned about recent studies indicating that anti-Semitic incidents have increased by more than 50% in France in 2004.

Last year, I met with the head of the Muslim community in Paris to discuss this and other related matters. In our meeting, he outlined factors contributing to the rise of Islamic extremism, such as the influx of foreign imams preaching fundamentalism in the mosque and inadequate government assistance to the community as whole. These problems are indicative of a larger issue surrounding some European governments' handling of rapidly changing demographics. It is clear that the threats emanating from isolated Muslim communities may decrease through enhanced integration of Muslims into Europe – including the accession of Turkey to the EU.

Mr. Chairman, despite some success in the war on terror, the United States and Europe remain vulnerable to impending security threats. Europe served as the nerve center for Al Qaeda prior to 9/11 and is still used as a haven for affiliates of Al Qaeda, Hezbollah

and Ansar-Al-Islam. As such, the EU and individual Member States must take a stronger stance against terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, which – according to Palestinian sources – poses the greatest threat to the tenuous situation in Gaza and the West Bank. In the past month alone, the House of Representatives passed a resolution urging the EU to add Hezbollah to its terrorist and the EU Parliament passed a similar resolution recommending that the EU Council take “all necessary steps to curtail” Hezbollah given its ongoing support of terror. Despite such action, the EU has failed to add Hezbollah to its terrorist list, leaving operatives and finances freely flowing throughout the EU. At this precarious time in the Middle East, I hope the EU will heed the calls of Congress and the EU Parliament and add Hezbollah to its terrorist list, which – in my mind – is long overdue.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses as they outline the scope and severity of this global threat and present options for eradicating Muslim extremism in the future.