

**Remarks on an Era:
Sense and Sensitivity,
the Mohamed's Sketches**

by Diamantis Krionidis

translated by Athena Avgitidou

Sense and sensitivity could be the current events' title. The publication of Mohamed's sketches by the newspaper "Jyllands Posten" obtained quickly great dimensions and the phenomenon's intensity raised -once more- anxiety to Europeans.

But let's examine the facts from the beginning. The events are more or less familiar: the aforementioned newspaper, sharing the inability of a local writer to find artists in order to illustrate his book concerning Mohamed's life, published a series of sketches with the Prophet. In that way the newspaper purported to support the view that Western societies sacrifice the freedom of expression due to a climate of terrorism and that it was high time someone reacted against this trend.

Reprints, manifestations, violent reactions, deaths, diplomatic complications, products' boycott, politicians' interventions, journalists' depositions were some of the 'episodes' which succeeded the publication.

It seems that there is a recurrent presence of the tensions provoked by 'assaults against faith' (see Salman Rushdie, "The Satanic Verses"). The frequency of the tensions convinces us that the problem is deeper. Others, of course, maintain that the tensions are inevitable due to the clash of civilizations (see Huntington).

In times of irrationality, sense is the only sound remaining criterion. The freedom of expression should not offend merely for the shake of publicity and internal

consumption. The reaction of the tolerant and democratic West might present a particular interest, if sketches insulting the reminiscence of the victims of the Second World War or the 11th of September had been published instead.

Contemporaneously, the fosterers of the rebellions against the abusive means of expression should realise that by this way they only serve the interests of their creators, which would be totally ignored in a different case. Nevertheless, it seems that this climate benefits the inspirators and publishers of the sketches who attempt to exchange it for 'wholesale publicity' and impulsive sales, as well as the self-appointed mentors of the excited masses who found yet one more opportunity to fortify their position.

The reaction to the right of expression cloaks eventually an even more serious and dangerous situation: the rejection of dialogue, the denial of the co-existence with the different, which conceals racism in the basis of ideologically coloured oppositional pairs (faithful- unfaithful, civilized- uncivilized, etc.)

What will be the course of the events? Which is the road of the prudent? Certainly, the demonstration of tolerance towards the different and the attempt of understanding the other or, in other words, sense and sensitivity.
