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Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science
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Beyond East and West: Eurasian Encounters Reimagined

9–10 July 2026, Gazi Husrev-bey Library,
Sarajevo - Bosnia and Herzegovina



THE ISLAM &
MUSLIMS INITIATIVE
مبادرة الاسلام
والمسلمون

Introduction

The Islam and Muslims Initiative, in collaboration with the University of Sarajevo, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, the Center for Advanced Studies in Sarajevo, and QatarDebate Center, are pleased to announce the international conference “**Beyond East and West: Eurasian Encounters Reimagined**”, to be held in Sarajevo on 9–10 July 2026.

The conference aims to provide an interdisciplinary platform for critically examining historical and contemporary encounters that have shaped interactions between Asia and Europe, and the ways in which religion, culture, and academic knowledge continue to inform understandings of identity, belonging, and coexistence. It encourages historically grounded and intellectually rigorous conversations that are also attentive to future challenges—conversations that not only reassess the past but also open new possibilities for navigating cultural and religious diversity in an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world. The conference brings together scholars, public intellectuals, journalists, policymakers, religious leaders, and university students.

About the Theme

The relationship between Asia and Europe has long played a formative role in shaping understandings of identity, religion, civilization, and knowledge. Yet this relationship has often been framed through binaries such as East and West, tradition and modernity, or religion and secularism—frameworks that tend to obscure the complexity of historical encounters and contemporary realities. As political, cultural, and intellectual exchanges continue to reshape the global landscape, there is a growing need to critically reexamine these assumptions and the categories through which they are expressed.

This conference explores Eurasia as a space of interaction rather than division, foregrounding its long history of movement, exchange, coexistence, and intellectual cross-fertilization. Within this perspective, religion is approached not merely as a domain of belief, but as a central lens through which Eurasian encounters have been historically mediated and through which identities continue to be negotiated in the present.

Particular attention is given to the role of Orientalism and related epistemological frameworks in shaping—and at times constraining—interpretations of the “East” and the “West.” The conference examines how these categories have been constructed, contested, and reimagined across different historical and geographical contexts, as well as how they continue to inform contemporary academic, political, and cultural discourses.

Through this lens, participants are invited to engage questions of identity, memory, postcoloniality, religion, and knowledge production in a world marked by both deep interconnection and persistent fragmentation. By moving beyond rigid geographical and conceptual binaries, the symposium seeks to foster a more nuanced understanding of how historical encounters continue to shape present realities and future possibilities.

At the same time, the conference creates space for rethinking how individuals and societies understand themselves in relation to others, opening pathways toward more plural, dialogical, and mutually enriching forms of engagement across cultural, religious, and civilizational boundaries. By doing so, it aspires to contribute to more inclusive and critically informed approaches to the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly complex global future.

Hosted in Sarajevo—a city shaped by centuries of interaction among diverse religious, cultural, and political traditions—the conference also draws symbolic and analytical inspiration from a context that embodies both the possibilities and tensions of coexistence across historical and civilizational intersections.

Program | Day 1

Opening Remarks

09:30 - 9:45

Prof. Tarik Zaimović
Rector of the University of Sarajevo.

Ms. Nofe K. Al Suwaidi
Secretary-General, Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science.

Reimagining Eurasia: Encounters, Identities, and Shared Futures

09:45 - 11:15 | Session 1

Speakers:

Prof. Olivier Roy | Prof. Recep Şentürk | Prof. Khairudin Aljunied

Moderator:

Prof. Dalia Fahmy

The opening session frames the conference's central concern: how have historical encounters across Eurasia shaped our contemporary understandings of religion, identity, and civilization, and how can we navigate an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world? And aims to explore how inherited categories may at times obscure the more complex histories of exchange, pluralism, and mutual influence.

Coffee Break

11:15 - 11:45

Islam and Europe: Historical Encounters, Identity, and Contemporary Reconfigurations

11:45 - 13:15 | Session 2

Speakers:

Prof. Ian Almond | Prof. Enes Karić | Dr. Peter Webb | Dr. Rezart Beka

Moderator:

Dr. Leila Almazova

This session explores the changing conditions of Muslim life in Europe, with particular attention to identity formation, citizenship, secularism, integration, and belonging. It aims to examine how Muslim communities negotiate the social, political, and cultural realities of contemporary Europe while challenging reductive assumptions that portray Muslims as perpetual outsiders to the European project.

Lunch Break

13:15 - 14:45

Media, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Representation in Eurasia

14:45 - 16:15 | Session 3

Speakers:

Dr. Sara Al Derham | Mr. AbdoolKarim Vakil | Dr. Zora Hesova | Ms. Đermana Kurić

Moderator:

Dr. Linda Hyökki

This session focuses on the role of journalism, public commentary, and policy discourse in shaping contemporary understandings of Muslims and Islam. It investigates how media institutions, commentators, and political actors influence public perceptions, construct moral panics, normalize certain vocabularies, and either deepen or challenge dominant misperceptions.

Coffee Break

16:15 - 16:45

Beyond Orientalism: Reframing Eurasian Encounters Ar

16:45 - 18:15 | Session 4

Speakers:

Prof. Xue Qingguo | Prof. Mahmoud Al-Hamza | Dr. Salvador Peña Martin | Mr. Asad Taha

Moderator:

Dr. Mohammad Al-Moctar Al-Shanqiti

This session examines how Islam and Muslims have been studied, represented, categorized, and institutionalized within European academic traditions. It asks how the fields of Oriental, Islamic, Middle Eastern, and Area Studies are being reconfigured today, and whether new intellectual paradigms are emerging beyond colonial legacies and ideological binaries.

End of First Day

Program | Day 2

09:00 - 10:30 | Session 5

Al Jazeera Center Stage

Reconstructing Narratives: Asia from Within

Speakers:

Dr. Ilham Habibie | Ms. Alissa Wahid

Dr. Naoki Yamamoto | Prof. A.K. Ramakrishnan

Dr. Syaza Shukri

Although many Asian societies lay far from Europe geographically, they were deeply shaped by the political, economic, intellectual, and cultural consequences of European colonialism and empire. Their histories move beyond the assumption that encounters occurred only at the immediate borders between Europe and Asia; revealing a wider web of connections, dependencies, exchanges, and forms of resistance that extended across the continent.

Bringing together scholars and public leaders from Southeast and Central Asia, this session explores how postcolonial experiences and emerging Global South studies are contributing to knowledge production from within Eurasia.

Youth Workshop (Closed)

Who Am I Beyond the Label? Youth, Identity, and the Search for Common Ground

In partnership with QatarDebate Center

As societies become increasingly interconnected, young people are navigating multiple layers of identity shaped by religion, culture, nationality, language, family traditions, and global influences. Yet despite unprecedented connectivity, many societies are experiencing growing polarization, social fragmentation, and uncertainty about belonging in an increasingly diverse world.

Bringing together Qatari and Bosnian students, this interactive workshop creates a space for honest dialogue on identity, belonging, and coexistence. Participants will explore how identities are shaped, negotiated, and understood across different cultural and religious contexts, while reflecting on the assumptions, labels, and narratives that often define how individuals and communities perceive one another.

Coffee Break

10:30 - 11:00

11:00 - 12:30 | Session 6

Varieties of Muslim Experiences Encountering Varieties of Europe

Speakers:

Dr. Francois Burgat | Dr. Masooda Bano

Moderator:

Dr. Tarik Yousef

In the Muslim encounter and experience with Europe, there isn't a single story or historical memory. Rather, there have been multiple, multidimensional experiences, and these encounters have been as much a story of co-existence as of mutual othering. Muslims and Islam have been both Europe's constitutive other, intrinsic to its self-conception, and constitutive of self.

Youth Workshop (Closed)

Beyond East and West: Designing Shared Futures

In partnership with QatarDebate Center

If young people were designing the future, what kind of world would they create?

Building on the conversations around identity, coexistence, and cultural understanding, participants will work together to imagine what education, citizenship, leadership, faith communities, and international cooperation could look like in 2050 for example. The session encourages participants to move beyond critique and contribute constructive ideas for a more connected and humane future.

Friday prayer and lunch break

12:30 - 15:00

Shared Futures: Ethics of Coexistence and Plurality in Eurasian Contexts

15:00 - 16:30 | Session 7

Speakers:

**Prof. Ibrahim Zein | Prof. Janez Vodičar | Ms. Sonja Biserko | Dr. Maryam Al-Kuwari
Prof. Ahmet Alibasic**

Moderator:

Dr. Seda Ozalkan

This concluding thematic session moves from critique to possibility. It asks what kinds of intellectual, political, educational, and ethical frameworks may foster more constructive Eurasian relations in the future. Topics may include interreligious dialogue, democratic pluralism, education, civic trust, youth, artificial intelligence, media ecosystems, cultural diplomacy, and the role of universities in strengthening social cohesion.

Coffee Break

16:30 - 17:30

Shared Futures, Shared Responsibilities

17:30 - 19:00 | Closing Reflection

Speaker:

Dr. Omar Suleiman

Building on the conversations explored throughout the conference, Dr. Omar Suleiman will reflect on how a deeper understanding of ourselves and others, can foster more meaningful forms of engagement, recognizing both the boundaries that shape identities and the shared concerns that require cooperation. In doing so, he will explore how religion can inform ethical engagement with the complexities of an increasingly interconnected and polarized world, cultivating wisdom, moral responsibility, and a commitment to the common good.

Beyond East and West: Eurasian Encounters Reimagined



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