



Peter C Kjærgaard
Western front

Well-funded creationists are on the march in Europe, writes Peter C Kjærgaard. The Council of Europe recently issued a resolution warning against the rise of creationism, based on a report that documented not only the existence of a strong Christian creationist lobby in Europe, but also the rise of Muslim creationism.

On 4 October 2007 the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly passed Resolution 1580, which issued a stark warning: creationism, the denial of Darwinian evolution, is on the rise in Europe. The resolution focused on the way that creationists across the continent, using the model pioneered in America, have been targeting education, and warned of "a real risk of serious confusion being introduced into our children's minds between what has to do with convictions, beliefs, ideals of all sorts and what has to do with science". "An 'all things are equal' attitude," it concludes, "may seem appealing and tolerant, but is in fact dangerous."

The resolution urged member states to "defend and promote scientific knowledge" and "firmly oppose the teaching of creationism as a scientific discipline on an equal footing with the theory of evolution." But what provoked this European body to issue such an uncharacteristically clear and forthright statement?

The resolution was based on a comprehensive report prepared by the Committee on Culture, Science and Education and delivered to the Assembly by the special rapporteur Guy Lengage on 5 June 2007. This report synthesised research from across the EU citing examples of the rise of creationism in 14 member states, as well as significant non-members Russia, Serbia and Turkey. Examples cited of a growing creationist influence ranged from subtle downgrading of evolution in science education to outright attacks on the validity of Darwinism and the personality of Darwin himself. In Greece, the report found, evolution education was relegated to the very bottom of the science curriculum, which often meant in effect that secondary students learnt nothing about it because of a lack of time. In Switzerland organisations like The European Biblical Centre and the ProGenesis group were devoting considerable resources to promoting creationist education. In Russia a 16-year-old girl launched a court case against the Ministry of Education, backed by the Russian Orthodox Church, challenging the teaching of just one "theory" of biology in school textbooks as a breach of her human rights. In the UK in 2006 the Intelligent Design propagandists [Truth in Science](#) sent out a "teaching pack" to every secondary school and sixth-form college in the country.

One of the more bizarre cases cited by the report comes from Poland, where in October 2006 deputy minister of education Miroslaw Orzechowski told the *Gazeta Wyborcza* that "The theory of evolution is a lie, an error that we have legalised as a common truth." He further argued that evolution is the "feeble idea of an aged non-believer" and put this error down to the fact that Darwin was "a vegetarian and lacked fire inside him".

Each of these cases confirms the existence of a strong Christian creationist lobby in Europe, but the report also focused its attention on a new phenomenon - the rise of Muslim creationism. The central figure here is the Turkish Muslim creationist Adnan Oktar, who, writing under the pen name [Harun Yahya](#), has made a career out of attacking Darwinian evolution. Oktar is a figure fairly well known to Darwinists and despite his claims to scientific competence is clearly little more than a crank. However what had changed, according to the report, was the scale and ambition of Oktar's pseudo-scientific message. Since 2006 copies of a substantial, glossy and smartly packaged book called *Atlas of Creation*, credited to Harun Yahya, had been arriving at schools and universities across Europe. In Spain, France, Switzerland and Denmark clear evidence of the growing resources and confidence of European Muslim creationism was thudding on to the mat. The book is the first of a projected seven-part series, and parts two and three have already begun arriving at educational institutes Europe-wide.

Clearly, for the assembly, the report amounted to strong evidence that creationists were working strategically across Europe, with the aim of influencing the science curriculum as well as public opinion. Though it does not say so explicitly the implication of the report is that creationists of different denominations and faiths are, or might soon be, working together in a concerted assault on science teaching, in the same way that American creationists have been for the past decade. In response to the call for action from the Assembly, only the Swedish government acted promptly, swiftly issuing a general ban on the teaching of creationism and Intelligent Design in their schools.

My own copy of *Atlas of Creation*, all six kilos, arrived in 2006, just after my research group at the University of Aarhus had launched our [Darwin in Denmark](#) project, with online editions of Danish translations of Charles Darwin's writings. In fact 20 copies arrived, unrequested and completely free.

Hardbound and expensively produced with almost 800 pages of text and images printed on glossy paper, this book presents one of the most remarkable attacks not only on the theory of evolution but on science itself. The book is full of scientific jargon, diagrams and tables, and appears to discuss Darwinian evolution in detail and refute it through careful consideration of the evidence of the fossil record, animal biology and the history of science. Most of this is the same old tired creationism, emphasising the gaps in the fossil record and making much of the various scientific hoaxes like "Piltdown Man" which, it argues, were attempts by Darwinians to fabricate proof for their hypothesis.

One of the most astonishing claims in the book is that Charles Darwin - the quiet Victorian gentleman naturalist - was responsible for the worst evils of the 20th century: racism, communism, fascism, Nazism, terrorism and, ultimately, 9/11. In a piece of overt symbolic theatre the book's creators marked the anniversary of 9/11 last year by sending the *Atlas* to a large number of Protestant priests across Europe. The message was clear: in the fight against the theory of evolution Christians and Muslims stand united.

But despite the hyperbolic claims the shock caused by *Atlas of Creation* is largely unrelated to its contents, which do not stand up to even the most cursory scrutiny. The real point is that before the book arrived many had no idea there was a resurgent Muslim creationism in Europe, and certainly didn't know it was so well funded and organised. Who, people began to ask, is bankrolling Oktar's [Science Research Foundation](#) or Global Publishing of Istanbul, which published and distributed the book? So far no one has been able to find out, and all Oktar says is that he is funded by donations.

One thing is clear: creationism has indeed come to Europe and unfortunately, therefore, we have to take it seriously. We can't afford to be complacent, or imagine that creationism is just a bizarre and distant American phenomenon. Just as manipulative as the worst of American creationists, European creationists are hard at work and some of them have a lot of money (Oktar also sent his book to many universities in the US). What we have seen so far is just the beginning.

As the bicentenary of Darwin's birth and 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of Species* coincide in 2009, those of us who support science have an excellent opportunity to reclaim the agenda. To be successful we need interdisciplinary collaboration, across all branches of science and the humanities. The issue at stake is not just a question of ideologically motivated attacks on the theory of evolution. At the very heart of the debate lies the question of the standing of academic knowledge in society. We need to take this seriously, both in the humanities and in the sciences. Now more than ever it is time to bridge the gap and together stop the nonsense.

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