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EUROPEAN  
**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
REPORT  

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2015

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ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)

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ISBN : 978-605-4023-68-4

Layout : Erkan Söğüt

Printed in Turkey, İstanbul by Turkuvaz Haberleşme ve Yayıncılık A.Ş., 2016

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# INTRODUCTION

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

In June 2014, the website for reporting hate crimes to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) went public. In 2014, only five states officially reported on hate crimes against Muslims, whereas civil society reported in 21 countries. Still, for the majority of the 57 member countries of the OSCE, there is no official information available. Furthermore, if one were to assess the quality of these state reports, it becomes apparent that the collected data does not always rely on a comprehensive systematic collection.

Since Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism has become a growing threat in European societies, we – the editors – felt an urgent need to address this problem. In fact, there are still people denying the very existence of racism against Muslims. Many state and civil society institutions have done priceless work to prove and establish the opposite: from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to the countless civil society organisations throughout Europe. Yet, institutions like the FRA publish only irregular reports on a restricted number of countries while most civil society organisations tackle racism in general and only few focus on Islamophobia in specific - this is the urgent gap our report wishes to fill.

The *European Islamophobia Report* (EIR) is an annual report, which is presented for the first time this year. It currently comprises 25 national reports regarding each state and the tendencies of Islamophobia in each respective country. The current report features the work of 37 extraordinary scholars. In the years to come we will attempt to cover even more countries. This report aims to enable policymakers as well as the public to discuss the issue of Islamophobia with the help of qualitative data. At the same time, several of its unique characteristic features make a difference to the current state of the debate on Islamophobia.

## **Contribution of this report**

The national reports in the EIR look at significant incidents and developments in each country during the period under review. The authors look at the employment sector: has there been any discrimination in the job market based on the (assumed) Muslimness of a person? They look at education: has Islamophobic content become part of any curricula, textbooks, or any other education material? The political field in a narrow sense is also a central aspect of the EIR: has Islamophobia played any role in politics, from election campaigns to political programmes to personal statements, etc., be it on a regional or national level? Authors also take a close look at a central force where Islamophobia has spread: the media. Which media events have focused on Islam/Muslims in an Islamophobic way? The justice system is also featured in the national reports: are there any laws and regulations that are based on Islamophobic arguments or any laws restricting the rights of Muslims in their religious lifestyle? Cyberspace as a central space for spreading hate crime is also examined: which web pages and initiatives have spread Islamophobic stereotypes? In addition, central figures in the Islamophobia network are discussed: which institutions and persons have, among others, fostered Islamophobic campaigns, stirred up debates or lobbied for laws?

Since the EIR is not content with pointing a finger at the problem, the reports also look at observed civil society and political assessment and initiatives undertaken to counter Islamophobia in the aforementioned fields. This will empower politicians and NGO activists, who want to tackle the issue. Since the EIR is not a purely scholarly work, at the end of every report, authors offer policy recommendations for politics and NGOs. An executive summary at the beginning and a chronology at the end of every report give the reader an overview on the state and the development of Islamophobia in the respective countries.

Since the single reports share broadly the same structure, the EIR offers the possibility to compare Islamophobia in these countries. Despite the fact that the data in specific fields is not available in an identical way for all countries, the report still facilitates an impulse for identifying research gaps.

Studies on Islamophobia have in the past predominantly concentrated on Western Europe. This is especially the case with reports focusing on Islamophobia. The EIR is the first to cover a wide range of Eastern European countries like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, or Latvia. This will enrich the debate on racism in general and Islamophobia in Europe in specific.

## **What is Islamophobia?**

Although the term 'Islamophobia' has become widely recognised in the Anglo-Saxon world and has become established in academia as can be seen by the numerous conferences, journals, and research projects dedicated to it, in many European countries, there is still a great amount of opposition to the term. One can understand the opposition expressed by the public not merely as an academic debate, but, in fact, as a sign of the hegemonic power of Islamophobic prejudices. Acknowledging this situation,

at the heart of this project lies the following working definition of Islamophobia:

“When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism studies have shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor to how it is used. Such is also the case with Islamophobia studies. Islamophobia has become a well-known term used in academia as much as in the public sphere. Criticism of Muslims or of the Islamic religion is not necessarily Islamophobic. Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed ‘we’. Islamophobia operates by constructing a static ‘Muslim’ identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalised for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts as Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam”.

### Central findings

That Islamophobia works without Muslims and tells us more about the anti-Muslim racists than it tells us about Islam and Muslims, can best be seen in the eastern region of Europe. In countries like Hungary, Finland, Lithuania, or Latvia, where only a small number of Muslims live, Islamophobia functions as a successful means to mobilise people. People not only greatly overestimate the country's Muslim population but, although Muslims have not committed any violent acts in most countries in the name of Islam, they are still often deemed violent and are considered to be terrorists.

It could be observed that both attacks in Paris, which happened in 2015, became a discursive event that shaped the debates on Islam and Muslims throughout Europe. Above that, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ was a central topic, which many actors linked to the issue of Muslims invading Europe. For example, the leader of the Hungarian Fidesz’ parliamentary club Antal Rogán warned of a future ‘United European Caliphate’,<sup>1</sup> while former Secretary of State László L. Simon urged Hungarians to return to their Christian spirituality and make more babies in order to counter the negative cultural effects of mass migration such as the envisioned ‘impending victory of Islamic parties imposing polygamy and destroying the remainder of European culture’.<sup>2</sup> This strong Islamophobic rhetoric is not restricted to the extreme right. In fact, the *refugee-migration-Islam-terrorism nexus* became the standard argument justifying a number of domestic and international measures. The social democrat Czech President Miloš Zeman claimed the influx of refugees into Europe was masterminded by Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood as “an organised invasion” to “gradually control Europe”.<sup>3</sup>

1. Károly Villányi, “Azt akarjuk, hogy unokáink egy európai kalifátusban éljenek?”, *Magyar Idők*, 14.11.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, <http://magyaridok.hu/belfold/azt-akarjuk-hogy-az-unokaink-egy-europai-kalifatusban-eljenek-5035/>.

2. “L. Simon: Szaporodjunk!”, *Népszabadság Online*, 05.09.2015, accessed 03.01.2016, [http://nol.hu/video/lSimon-a-szaporodasban-latja-a-jovot-1573295?utm\\_source=mandiner&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_campaign=mandiner\\_201601](http://nol.hu/video/lSimon-a-szaporodasban-latja-a-jovot-1573295?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_201601).

3. Agence France-Presse, “Integrating Muslims into Europe is ‘impossible’, says Czech president”, 18 January, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/18/integrating-muslims-into-europe-is-impossible-says-czech-president> (accessed 8 March, 2016)

## Policy Recommendations

Islamophobia poses a great risk to the democratic foundations of European constitutions and social peace as well as the coexistence of different cultures throughout Europe. Both civil society actors and states should acknowledge the seriousness of this issue and develop concrete policies to counter Islamophobia. Here we have summarised some of the important policy recommendations from the national reports.

- Islamophobia should be acknowledged as a crime and should be included in all national statistics throughout Europe.
- Hate crime legislations should be adopted in all European countries that acknowledge one's religious identity as being a basis upon which one may be targeted.
- In order to collect data about Islamophobic incidents, victims registers must be introduced in all European states.
- In order to help the victims of Islamophobic attacks, counseling services for victims must be established in all European states.
- Journalists, lawyers, Police (security officials) and legal authorities in all European countries should be educated by qualified personnel in regards to Islamophobia.
- Muslim civil society has to be empowered with information to combat Islamophobia, especially in the direction of the creation of a consciousness of the illegality of hate crimes.
- Educational institutions and stakeholders have to work towards creating an alternative narrative of Muslims in the respective countries which will work to dispel the widely accepted negative image of Islam.
- Civil society actors must also push for legislative change in the context of school enrolment policies so that all members of the respective societies are treated fairly when accessing education.
- Governments must draft a policy that ensures that the rights of religious minorities to manifest their faith are respected in education and the workplace; this must not be left to the preferences of individual boards of management or principals.
- Discrimination on the job market towards Muslims and especially Muslims who wear veils is a widespread phenomenon. This should be recognised and seriously addressed by better legal regulations and the creation of a relevant consciousness.
- Civil society actors must engage with media actors/outlets in terms of the publication and broadcasting of standards in order to reduce/minimise the use of racialising discourses vis-à-vis Muslims and other minority communities.
- The civil rights violations experienced by women wearing headscarves should be addressed by lawmakers and politicians.
- An independent media watchdog should be established in order to monitor media reports in real time in all respective countries.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN  
**FRANCE**  
NATIONAL REPORT 2015

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OLIVIER ESTEVES



## THE AUTHOR

**Oliver Esteves**, is a professor of British studies at Lille University. He works on the sociology and history of immigration and race relations in Britain, and on British intellectuals (George Orwell, Bertrand Russell). He is the author of *Une Histoire populaire du boycott*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2006 (two volumes). He edited with Denis Lacorne et Emmanuelle Le Texier *Les Politiques de la diversité : expériences anglaise et américaine* (Paris : Presses de Sciences-Po, 2010). He also published *De l'invisibilité à l'islamophobie: musulmans britanniques (1945-2010)*, Presses de Sciences-Po, 2011, with a preface by Gérard Noiriel. He has edited, with Jean-Jacques Rosat (Collège de France) and translated into French, with Claire Esteves, Bertrand Russell's *World War I texts: Le Pacifisme et la révolution, texts politiques (1914-1918)*, Marseille: Agone, 2014. His last book is with Sébastien Lefait, *La Question raciale dans les séries américaines* (Presses de Sciences-Po, 2014). He is currently doing research on the history of (ethnic) bussing in England for a book entitled *Babylon by Bus? Dispersal and the Desegregation of English schools (1960s-1970s)*, which will be published by a British press by 2018-9. He frequently publishes press articles in *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Rue89*, *Huffington Post* (France), on issues of racism and Islamophobia in France and Britain. He is a member of the editorial board of the sociological news website : [www.laurent-mucchielli.org](http://www.laurent-mucchielli.org) founded by sociologist Laurent Mucchielli. [olivier.esteves@univ-lille3.fr](mailto:olivier.esteves@univ-lille3.fr)

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**To cite this report:** Olivier Esteves (2016): *Islamophobia in France: National Report 2015*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, Istanbul, SETA, 2016.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2015 was chronologically framed by two events taking place in France but whose resonance was instantly global: the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks on 7 January and the Paris and Saint- Denis attacks on 13 November. These tragic events fuelled an already widespread Islamophobic feeling in a country that has the largest Muslim group in Europe. After the Charlie Hebdo attacks, an inclusive public discourse laid emphasis on the need not to confuse Muslims in general and the tiny minority of terrorists. Yet, after 13 November, public authorities, notably by raiding mosques, Muslim associations and by targeting certain imams, bolstered the by now largely shared view that Muslims are a security issue in the country. Despite this distinction between January and November, it is clear that assaults against Muslims, mosques and Islamophobic discourse more generally skyrocketed both after the Charlie Hebdo and the Bataclan attacks.

The national context in which these events are set is ominous: an ever-growing far right with a Front National setting the tone of the political debate, a large number of Islamophobic bestsellers weighing heavily on public debate, a further entrenched urban and schooling segregation jeopardising national cohesion (ten years after the 2005 urban disturbances) and, just as worryingly, a French articulation of secularism (*laïcité*) which is promoted by many as a bulwark against Islam (i.e. the belief that religion should be excluded from public space altogether).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY IN FRENCH

L'année 2015 a commencé et s'est terminée avec deux événements français dont l'impact a été instantanément mondial : les attentats contre Charlie-Hebdo (7 janvier) et les attentats de Paris et de Saint-Denis prenant notamment pour cible la salle de concert du Bataclan, le 13 novembre. Ces faits tragiques ont puissamment alimenté une Islamophobie déjà forte dans un pays qui compte le groupe musulman le plus important en Europe. Juste après les attentats de Charlie-Hebdo, le discours officiel a insisté sur la nécessité de ne pas confondre la composante musulmane de la société française et l'infime minorité de terroristes en son sein. Mais la donne a changé après le 13 novembre, notamment parce les autorités ont perquisitionné des mosquées et des associations musulmanes, et ont ciblé des imams, ce qui a corroboré l'idée selon laquelle les musulmans eux-mêmes constituent un problème de sécurité publique. Mais, malgré cette différence entre janvier et novembre, on a de toute façon assisté à l'accroissement exponentiel du nombre d'attaques contre les musulmans et les mosquées, et à une recrudescence du discours islamophobe, à la fois après janvier (Charlie-Hebdo) et après novembre (Bataclan).

Le contexte national où il nous faut replacer ces événements est lui-même inquiétant : montée de l'extrême droite avec un Front National qui impose de nombreuses thématiques du débat politique, nombre important de best-sellers islamophobes qui pèsent sur le débat public, ségrégation urbaine et scolaire qui met à mal la cohésion nationale du pays (dix ans après les violences urbaines de 2005) et, tout aussi inquiétant, laïcité qui semble de plus en plus appréhendée comme un rempart contre l'islam (l'idée selon laquelle la religion n'a tout simplement pas sa place dans l'espace public).

## INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia in France has been chronologically framed by two events one occurring very early and the rather late in the year: the terrorist attacks targeting Charlie Hebdo on 7 January and the still much deadlier attacks targeting the Stade de France as well as café and restaurant terraces and the Bataclan Concert Hall, resulting in the death of 130 civilians. Both events have also shaped Islamophobic discourse outside France, as is testified by the other contributions to this report.

## RELUCTANCE TO USE 'ISLAMOPHOBIA' IN FRANCE

**Abstract concepts and the French.** The legitimacy of Islamophobia as a concept has been challenged ever since 1997, when it was introduced in public debate following the publication of the Runnymede Trust report *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All*. Although such debates find obvious echoes elsewhere, their resonance in France is probably stronger because of a specifically French penchant for abstract ideas and concepts<sup>1</sup> - regardless of how painful the consequences of Islamophobia may be. This interest was tragically rekindled in January: the editor in chief and cartoonist of Charlie Hebdo Charb, who died in the attacks, had just completed a pamphlet entitled *Letter to the Islamophobia Cheats Who are Fuelling Racism*. This was published in mid April 2015, and confirmed for some that Islamophobia is a dangerous concept that is the darling of Muslim extremists.

**Hollande, Valls and Islamophobia.** For all that, 'Islamophobia' as a concept did make some headway in 2015. President François Hollande, in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, declared in his New Year greetings to the foreign diplomatic corps that "France is an implacable opponent of racism, of anti-Semitism, of Islamophobia",<sup>2</sup> a statement which commentator Claude Askolovitch was right to consider as a breakthrough of sorts.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Manuel Valls, the French prime minister, obdurately refuses to use the word: as home secretary, he went as far as to claim on 31 July, 2013 that the word is a Salafist Trojan horse, whose late 1970s origin is linked with some Iranian Mollahs' willingness to silence all critique of Islam and Muslims. This mistaken etymology owes much to the diatribes of media-savvy commentator Caroline Fourest.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Sudhir Hazareesingh, *How The French Think: An Affectionate Portrait of an Intellectual People* (Philadelphia : Basic Books, 2015).

2. For the full translation into English of this speech that took place on 16 January, see <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/new-year-greetings-to-the-foreign-diplomatic-corps/>

3. I-Télé, 16 January, 2015.

4. Marwan Mohamed, Abdellali Hajjat, *Islamophobie: comment les élites françaises fabriquent le problème musulman* (Paris : La Découverte, 2013), 71-72.

The French state's ambivalence towards the concept is probably reflected in the yearly report *The Fight Against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia* issued by the CNCDH (Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme). In 2013, the report had already included a debate on Islamophobia, admitting that none of the concepts mobilised to engage with racism are themselves totally satisfactory and that Islamophobia was no exception. In the 2014 report, published on 21 March 21, 2015 and therefore partly taking into account the consequences of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, Islamophobia is indeed used, alongside "aversion to Islam", "aversion to Muslims" and "anti-Muslim acts".<sup>5</sup> But the word is much less used than xenophobia or anti-Semitism and it does not find its way into the actual title of the report, nor does it appear in the very detailed table of contents of this long, 574-page document.

**Dodging the painful issue.** Nevertheless, Islamophobia is more and more commonly used, and polemics around it might ultimately be a way to dodge the very real issue of the consequences of Muslim-hatred in France, as is argued here by one C.C.I.F. (Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France) spokesperson: "This polemic is a ludicrous political strategy to lose sight of the reality of the problem. It's like a jam jar with a weird colour. Instead of spending hours squabbling over what it may contain, let's open the jar and see what's inside".<sup>6</sup> M'hammed Henniche, a Muslim association leader in Seine-Saint-Denis, and president of the Pantin Mosque, stresses that "Muslims in France don't give two hoots about what this is called, really. What they simply can't stand is when they're told that there's no problem that hostility against Muslims doesn't really exist or is clearly exaggerated".<sup>7</sup>

## ISLAMOPHOBIC ACTS IN 2015: A WORRYING PICTURE

Le Monde published an article on 23 January revealing that since the beginning of the year, anti-Muslim acts within one month had been almost as numerous as over the previous year as a whole. This is according to the Observatory of Islamophobia, itself a branch of the state-sponsored C.F.C.M. The figures given by C.C.I.F., a bottom-up association dealing with legal counselling for Muslims who are assaulted, discriminated against or abused, draw a similar picture. C.C.I.F. published a report on 1 July indicating that during the first six months of 2015, anti-Muslim physical assaults (necessitating at least 8 days of temporary work interruption) had skyrocketed by 500 %, whilst verbal abuse had increased by 100 %. Physical acts against

5. In Commission Consultative des Droits de l'Homme, *La Lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie* (Paris, La Documentation française, 2015); Islamophobia (16-17, 218, 415-7, 422), anti-Muslim (89, 418), aversion to Islam/aversion to Muslims (223, 232-233).

6. *Slate*, 17.01.2015.

7. Interview, 17.12.2015.

mosques had soared by 400 %. As can be expected, 75 % of assaulted persons are women, while 25 % are men (both in 2015 and 2014). All these figures are drawn from individual contacts made with the C.C.I.F. by wronged Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Few of these victims ultimately file complaints against their aggressors, either because they think the police will hear none of it, or because they know that if condemned at all, the wrong-doers will be meted out mild sentences.

Many of the consequences of the horrendous terrorist attacks of 13 November can only be guessed since it is probably too early in late December to make a rational assessment of all the acts perpetrated. One of the first decisions taken by C.C.I.F. was to hire three extra legal counsellors in the expectation that the already impressive figures given above would themselves increase anew. Some of these consequences are looked into in the last part of this report.

## **“SORRY BUT ... YOU LIVE TOO FAR”: ASSESSING ISLAMOPHOBIA ON THE JOB MARKET**

**An unknown known.** France is both the European country with the largest Muslim group and a Republic that has no ethnic or religious statistics, because it is seen as anathema to the very idea of a Republic that does not recognize communities but individual citizens. Consequently, it has been very difficult to gauge the actual extent of racial and/or religious discrimination. On top of this, it is generally way more difficult to identify anti-Muslim discrimination on the job market than explicit anti-Muslim aggressions, or overtly Islamophobic discourse. This is probably why the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (C.F.C.M) gathers statistics on anti-Muslim acts, but stops short of collecting information on religious discrimination on the job market, which the C.C.I.F. does. What compounds this difficulty is the double-standard largely interiorised by some Muslims, especially those who believe they will inevitably look “too Muslim” to recruiters. Many hijab-wearing women are painfully aware of how slim the chances are for them to get jobs outside their own community businesses. Therefore, discrimination must also be apprehended in terms of positions not even applied for, itself a tendency which by definition is impossible to quantify.

**An unprecedented research.** These difficulties notwithstanding, economist Marie-Anne Valfort and the public policy think tank Institut Montaigne launched a totally unprecedented testing experiment, released as a report entitled *Les Discriminations religieuses à l’embauche: une réalité*. It consisted of sending applications to 6.231 job offers in the bookkeeping departments of companies all across the country,

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8. The short January-June 2015 report is available at <http://www.islamophobie.net/sites/default/files/Rapport-CCIF-2015.pdf>

from September 2013 to September 2014.<sup>9</sup> So, although the results were made public in October 2015, the study does not take into account the recent anti-Muslim backlash following the January and November terrorist attacks.

To identify the extent of religious (rather than racial) discrimination, six CVs were sent by 6 distinct applicants, all French citizens of Lebanese origins, 3 young men and 3 young women who were taught in Lebanese schools: 2 Christian (Michel and Nathalie), 2 Jewish (Dov and Esther), 2 Muslim (Samira and Mohammed). The results are edifying: Michel had to send 5 CVs before getting a job interview, Nathalie 4, Dov 7, Esther 5, Samira 6 and Mohammed 20. Faith markers could be obtained thanks to the applicants' names, the type of schools they attended, their native tongue and/or the faith-based associations they were involved in. In order to further gauge the stereotypes associated with faith-oriented people (especially Muslims), the study included CVs sent by secular as well as practising Christians, Jews and Muslims. In addition, some CVs were just 'ordinary' applications whereas others were clearly 'outstanding ones'.

To appear secular for Muslim males enables them to escape discrimination. By default then, it would seem that recruiters often associate them with extreme religiosity, thereby reducing their chances of getting a job interview, let alone being hired. For practising Christian and Jewish females, having an outstanding profile is enough to neutralize discrimination. But discrimination against outstanding and practising Muslim males is strong, so much so that practising Muslim males are not promoted when indicating their excellence. The study, interestingly, does not include hijab-wearing females. Marie-Anne Valfort's testing initiative also concludes that Muslim males are discriminated against in firms both in the private and public sector, as well as in small and large businesses. She draws an alarming conclusion: "France is caught into a vicious circle wherein discrimination against minorities fuels their inward-looking character, which in turn exacerbates the very discrimination they are the victims of".<sup>10</sup> Probably more alarming is the fact that the French government is clearly reluctant to take the bull of religious discrimination by the horns, that this report itself was barely reported in the media, and that the Institut Montaigne itself has been willing to diagnose a real problem, not to find ways to actually address it.

## HIGHER EDUCATION, EXCLUSIVE LAÏCITÉ AND 'THE SOCIAL APARTHEID'

**Banning veils on campuses?** For some, the 2004 law banning religious signs in French schools did at least clarify matters on this issue, but more than ten years later

9. Download at [http://www.institutmontaigne.org/res/files/publications/20150824\\_Etude%20discrimination.pdf](http://www.institutmontaigne.org/res/files/publications/20150824_Etude%20discrimination.pdf)

10. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

reality seems to suggest otherwise. It is a fact that the law does not affect higher education. And yet, since 2004, there have always been zealous academics -including a substantial proportion of self-styled feminists- who have banned or excluded Muslim students wearing a veil. The issue erupted again after State Secretary for Women's Rights Pascale Boistard publicly stated on 2 March, 2015: "I am not sure the veil belongs in higher education",<sup>11</sup> before admitting she was in favour of such a ban on French campuses. In so doing, she echoed similar viewpoints expressed by Manuel Valls before he was prime minister, and a recommendation made by the High Council for Integration back in 2013.<sup>12</sup>

Boistard's declaration seems to have vindicated the illegal decision to refuse to admit such female students. Jihane Abdoune, a PhD student who deals with discrimination cases for the French Muslim Students association (Étudiants Musulmans de France), witnessed, just days after Boistard's statement, a soaring number of similar cases, and has had to defend the French legislation across the country. Interviews with local branches of E.M.F. at Lille, Poitiers, Rouen and Lyon confirm this evolution in the wake of Boistard's declaration. Many bitterly lament being dismissed as an almost "foreign presence" ("what are you doing in France?" is sometimes demanded of these mostly French-born students) whilst having to remind French academics of the actual contents of French legislation. Jihane Abdoun also states that "because they're afraid for their exams and often have a low profile themselves, those students generally don't end up issuing complaints. And they often say nothing to their parents".<sup>13</sup> Eventually, on 15 December, the government-led 'Observatoire de la laïcité' issued a statement that "it is neither useful nor timely" to introduce a ban, since out of a total of 2,5 million students, only 130 isolated cases of "religious disagreements or conflicts"<sup>14</sup> have appeared.

**Freedom of religion or freedom from Islam?** These isolated controversies on French campuses are rooted in a harmful misunderstanding on the meaning of secularism, or laïcité. The CNCDH 2014 survey of 1,020 people reveals that laïcité is associated with three distinct dimensions: living together in society (54 % of respondents), the outlawing of religious displays in public space (50 %) and the separation between church and state (47 %). Whilst students and highly qualified people generally associate French secularism with state neutrality and freedom of religion, the French that live in rural areas, are unqualified and at least middle-aged more often have a restrictive view of secularism. Lastly, practising Catholics are more inclined to

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11. *Le Talk Figaro* (online broadcast), 02.03.2015; <http://video.lefigaro.fr/figaro/video/pascale-boistard-j-en-appelle-a-la-mobilisation-de-l-electorat-de-gauche/4088146795001/>

12. Abdellali Hajjat, Julien Beaugé, "Elites français et construction du 'problème musulman', le cas du Haut Conseil à l'Intégration", *Sociologie*, 5 (2014), 31-59.

13. Interview, 26.11.2015.

14. *Le Figaro*, 15.12.2015.

see secularism as a bulwark against Islam, or a way to preserve an ethnically defined French identity.<sup>15</sup>

It is precisely this misunderstanding which irritates a growing number of Muslims in France. Hassan Oufkir, head teacher of Lycée Averroès (Lille) is thankful to a French legislation system which, owing to the country's state neutrality, makes it possible for Catholics, Jews and Muslims to have their own state-financed schools. Oufkir makes it clear that "public authorities don't have the same reaction as the public at large on secularism; civil servants read the texts and apply the texts. There's a legal arsenal that protects us".<sup>16</sup> But many Muslims are critical of what they see as a dangerous deviance, a reversal of roles whereby people making use of certain public services (town halls, transports) should not be wearing religious signs whereas in fact it behoves the public service providers themselves (teachers, etc) to be neutral under a secular regime. Mohamed Meniri, in charge of the association running the Bondy Mosque in Seine-Saint-Denis, states that because of this twisting of *laïcité* Jean Jaurès, one of the four architects of the 1905 legislation of state-church separation, "must be turning in his grave".<sup>17</sup> Maged Osmane, the main imam at Montreuil's Great Mosque (east of Paris) regrets that secularism in France "has become like a civil extremist religion"<sup>18</sup> losing sight of what it primarily is about. A great deal of irritation is expressed by the interviewees of this report. This is fuelled by a few recent high-profile cases: in April 2015, in the Ardennes town of Charleville-Mézières, Sarah, a 15-year-old high school student who wears a hijab but removes it before reaching her school, was twice refused entry at her Collège Léo Lagrange because she was wearing "too long a skirt", construed as "an ostentatious religious sign".<sup>19</sup> Najjat Vallaud-Belkacem, the education minister, indicated that the teaching staff had reacted with "discernment" in the whole matter.<sup>20</sup>

**"We want blond-haired pupils with our kids".** If *laïcité* often serves to legitimise a respectable form of anti-Muslim hostility, certain reforms under President Sarkozy further entrenched Muslim, ethnic-minority and working-class exclusion. One such reform was the relaxing of the catchment areas for state schools, which strengthened an actual education market driven by parental choice. As could be expected, the Sarkozy reform further weakened banlieues schools with a large intake of ethnic minority pupils, including many Muslims. These have been threatened with becoming ghetto schools altogether, devoid of the social mix at the root of a 'living

15. For further details, see op. cit., 39-40, 229-234.

16. Interview, 17.12.2015.

17. Interview, 14.12.2015.

18. Interview, 04.12.2015.

19. *L'Ardennais*, 28.04.2015 ; *Le Monde*, 29.04.2015.

20. RTL Radio Station, 30.04.2015.

together' (vivre ensemble) which is constantly promoted in public debate. In spring 2015, in Montpellier, citizens from the northwest neighbourhood of Petit Bard actively engaged with the ghettoisation of their schools; Las Cazes High School has a 95 % intake of French of Moroccan origins and mothers of pupils there have exposed the government's Janus-like attitude towards the 'social Apartheid' exposed by Prime Minister Manuel Valls in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks. The leaders of this local movement are all female Muslims originating from Morocco, housewives who wear hijabs. One of them, Safia, argues "We want our children, who are French citizens, to be regarded and educated like others. How do you expect them to feel French if they grow up exclusively with people from their own group? We wish there were a few blond- and red-haired people on the school photos".

These local developments at Montpellier in 2015 have little to do directly with Islamophobia, but the capitalistic rationales in education and housing policies have generated certain urban consequences too often attributed to Muslims because they are Muslims (under the name of communautarisme in French, or self-ghettoisation). The ghettoisation directly challenged by these Montpellier Muslim women is conducive to an urban separateness which, in turn, begets the conditions of Islamophobia. The Montpellier situation itself is little different from the urban geography of other major cities in France. Lastly, such mobilisations testify to the agency of working-class veil-wearing Muslim females, at a remove from well-worn stereotypes.

**Culture wars in Corsica.** In southern Corsica, an elementary school teacher in the town of Prunelli-di-Fiumorbu, Annelise Hallard, is a woman with much teaching experience and grassroots knowledge of Corsica. For her year-end school party, she organised, months ahead, the singing of Imagine by John Lennon in five languages either taught in the school or spoken in the community: French, English, Corsican, Spanish and Arabic. She never anticipated the furore this would bring about. Repeatedly threatened, the teachers had to recoil and even made use of their 'right of withdrawal' (a labour legislation allowing one not to go to work when one's physical integrity is menaced)<sup>21</sup> in mid June 2015. This shows that, in France (and here in Corsica), Islamophobia bears a strong anti-Arab racist dimension, itself a leftover of French colonial history. It is also possible to construe this event as a 'White Backlash' incident of sorts, itself an unsatisfactory phrase since the great bulk of Muslims in France see themselves as 'white'. But what is meant here is that, as in 'White Backlash' elsewhere (the U.S, Britain), this Corsican incident unleashed indignant feelings that ethnic minorities get preferential treatment by public authorities, feelings that are intensified by decreasing public resources and an ethnic-linguistic dimension specific to Corsican nationalism writhing under French Republicanism. Annelise Hallard recalls hearing a barrage of wild rumours, all of the 'White Backlash' type: "we don't

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21. *Libération*, 16.06.2015.

even get breaded fish fillet at the canteen”, “our daughter will have to wear a veil at school”, “we’ll again have to struggle to get a crèche in the Town Hall”, “we can’t even wear uniforms at the base”<sup>22</sup>, “we’re tired of halal food at the yearend party” - all of which were utterly fallacious, all of which are often fed by sheer ignorance. The substantial Moroccan community in the town was silent during the whole incident, or merely said “we never asked anything”.<sup>23</sup> The issue of racism (and Islamophobia) in Corsica was raised again months later, after Christmas Day, in the wake of the grisly attack against a Muslim prayer room in the town of Ajaccio.

## THE FRONT NATIONAL, AN ISLAMOPHOBIC PARTY SETTING THE TONE OF PUBLIC DEBATE

**A needless campaign.** As they checked the many headlines on young French Muslims going to Syria, on the so-called ‘migrant crisis’ in Europe, and of course on the January and November terrorist attacks, Front National leaders very quickly realised they barely needed to campaign for the regional elections. This was illustrated by the near absence of debate on the financing of high schools and of public transports which are primarily the prerogatives of the French regions. It turned out that the campaign was totally focused on issues which are outside the remit of regions: immigration issues, law and order, anti-terrorism, and Islam. Amazingly, any foreigner arriving in France during the campaign could have been forgiven for thinking this was a presidential election, not (merely) a regional one.

**The Front National going mainstream?** The 2015 regional elections introduced new territorial boundaries in an effort to reduce the number of regions from 22 to 13 in the French metropolis. The results of the second round leave the Front National without a single region, but very clearly this has been no defeat for the far right party that has put Islamophobia at the heart of its electoral campaign. Indeed, on 13 December, the party managed to garner 6,82 million votes, improving its first round total of 6,01 million, and surpassing even its best ever total, at the 2012 presidential elections (first round), which had been 6,42 million. No surprise then, that on the night of the second-round results, it was all smiles in the local headquarters of the far right party, despite the absence of a regional victory. This was largely thanks to a successful ‘Republican Front’ (Front Républicain) which made many left-wing people vote for what they painfully realised was the lesser of two evils: Xavier Bertrand in the north, Christian Estrosi in the south. It is no secret that some of the ‘Républicains’ who are indefatigable Sarkozy allies have very dangerously promoted Islamophobic causes, especially (albeit not exclusively) in the southeast (Lionel Lucas, Christian Es-

22. The Corsican town is 20 miles from the major airbase of Solenzara, in this largely agricultural area.

23. Interview, Annelise Hallard, 05.12.2015.

troisi, Eric Ciotti). Conversely, the Front National has painstakingly tried to boost its political respectability, for instance by shedding its former anti-Semitic dimension. One key decision in this respect was the sacking, on 20 August, of Jean-Marie Le Pen from the party he had created back in 1972. This gesture must be apprehended as part of an effort to make the Front National a real mainstream party.

In the current French context though, ‘mainstream’ actually includes bearing an overtly Islamophobic character. At grassroots level, since 2010, campaigning Front National militants are repeatedly being told to avoid making any comment on Jews, and are advised to have a field day against Muslims, Islam, and Roma people. This attitude has been thus summarised by Louis Alliot, the Front National’s vice-president: “One must be clear about this de-demonisation process: this only affects our alleged anti-Semitism. It doesn’t affect immigration or Islam, two issues on which it might be a good thing to be demonised, as Nicolas Sarkozy has shown”.<sup>24</sup> For one thing, these aggressive sound bites bolster the view that the Front National is a plain-speaking party at a remove from the ‘political-correctness’ of ‘bleeding-heart liberals’, often labelled ‘Bobos’ (Bourgeois Bohemians) in France.

Professor Nonna Mayer exposes the “myth of the Front National’s de-demonisation”, in a very detailed study based on an ethnocentrism index with ten questions on immigration, integration, and cultural diversity in France. Two of these questions are directly about Islam/Muslims: (1) “French Muslims are French people like others”; (2) “We should allow French Muslims to practise their faiths in good conditions”. The ethnocentric index is calculated according to the interviewee’s attitude towards these questions. By narrowing down the ethnocentrism index to respondents who are Front National sympathisers, one finds that, quite unambiguously, they break all ethnocentric and intolerance records on these questions. These findings are important since they scientifically question the validity of the ‘de-demonisation’/‘mainstreaming’ process at work within the Front National, too often taken for granted by the French media. This near-consensus is reflected in the vocabulary itself: the French word ‘dédiabolisation’ (solely associated with this specific question in mind) actually found its way into the Larousse dictionary in 2015.<sup>25</sup>

**Illegal statistics that stigmatise.** Repeatedly in 2015, the Muslim/Islamist/immigrant threat has seemed to loom so large that some locally elected figures have decided to jettison republican traditions or rules in order, precisely, to save the Republic from alleged foreign chaos. Two examples may suffice: Robert Ménard, mayor of the southern, economically run-down city of Béziers (71,000 inhabitants),

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24. Dominique Albertini, Albert Doucet, *Histoire du Front National* (Paris: Tallandier, 2013), 311.

25. Alexandre Dézé, “La Dédiabolisation” in *Les Faux semblants du Front National: sociologie d’un parti politique* edited by Sylvain Crépon, Alexandre Dézé, Nonna Mayer (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 2015), 27-50.

which serves as a laboratory for the far-right,<sup>26</sup> stated on a major TV broadcast on 4 May that in his city “64.6 % of the children at primary and elementary level are Muslims”, a statistic he came up with on the basis of the names of the pupils on roll. A scandal ensued, because those statistics are illegal in France and are evocative of the Vichy Régime’s holding of ethnic statistics against Jews.

**Christian refugees, please.** Another major breach of French republicanism occurred when certain mayors readily accepted to welcome refugees, but were willing to prioritise Christian ones. Such was the case of the right-wing mayor of the eastern town of Belfort Damien Meslot, and of another conservative, Yves Nicolin, who is mayor of the town of Roanne near Lyon. Meslot argued that “Christians were the most persecuted ones”, and that he wanted “to do something for the most persecuted ones” in Syria and Iraq.<sup>27</sup> Such a moderately Islamophobic move in a humanitarian cloak was curtly dismissed by Home Secretary Bernard Cazeneuve: “France is about universality. Whoever is being persecuted can rightfully be welcome here”.<sup>28</sup> On the ground in Roanne and Belfort, many Muslims understood such declarations as stigmatising comments against Muslims. The imam of the An Nour Mosque in Roanne, Madi Ounis, met Nicolin, and echoed the minister’s universalist stance, by telling the mayor “if a refugee is dying, will you ask him whether he’s Christian or Muslim?” before reminding him that “as mayor he represents all Roanne people, Christians, Jews, Muslims and others. I said I perceive in your declarations a real religious segregation”.<sup>29</sup>

Two types of discourses sustain these differentialist statements on religious statistics and Christian refugees which strikingly clash with France’s universalist republicanism: one is a nostalgic discourse that harks back to the supposedly glorious times before France was threatened by foreign, inassimilable people (mostly Muslims), the other is a doom-saying discourse about the rampant Islamisation of France, of Europe, and the idea of the ‘grand remplacement’, itself a paranoid notion of some conspiracy wrought by Africans and Muslims to oust Western civilisation at its best, i.e. as it is embodied in universalist France.

## **PUBLIC DEBATE IN 2015, A STIFLING MANICHAISM**

**Who is Charlie?** Unsurprisingly, the January killings of some well-known public figures in France (cartoonists Charb and Cabu, economist Bernard Maris among

26. Although not a member of the Front National, Ménard was elected mayor in 2014 with the full support of the party.

27. This was during a TV interview on 7 September, 2015, for the local channel France-3 Franche-Comté.

28. On “Télématin”, France-2 TV Channel, 08.09.2015.

29. Interview, 19.11.2015.

others) in the very heart of Paris made conditions extremely difficult for Muslims to both express their detestation of the deadly attacks as well as their critical distance from a weekly magazine -Charlie Hebdo- that had pandered to and fuelled Islamophobic prejudices at large in French and European society. To venture to do this was to sound suspicious, especially for those who had Muslim-sounding names. It is with this critical intent in mind that a group of nine Muslim academics published a text on the Mediapart news website, starting with the classical W.E.B. Du Bois 1903 question “How Does It Feel To Be a Problem?”<sup>30</sup>

The national trauma of the attacks meant that freedom of expression was as it were limited to those who were ready to proclaim “Je suis Charlie”. This, in turn, inspired journalist Pierre Rimbart, who entitled an article “Soyez Libres, c’est un ordre” (“Be Free, it’s an order”).<sup>31</sup> So it came as a shock that across the country, some French were not ready to embrace the now international motto. Hearing that in some run-down banlieue schools the commemoration of the victims was sometimes disrupted, a few politicians from various parties started to doubt among others those students’ Frenchness, their understanding of *laïcité*, their integration and their embrace of the symbols of the Republic. Prime Minister Manuel Valls bluntly stated that there is in France “a territorial, social, ethnic Apartheid”, before dismissing the very concept of ‘integration’ as “not meaning anything any more” and arguing that the “stigmata” and “tensions” that had sparked the 2005 urban disturbances throughout the country were “still there”.<sup>32</sup> But absolutely no ambitious plan was suggested to address this “social Apartheid” issue.

**A useful idiot.** On 7 May, demographer Emmanuel Todd published his essay *Qui est Charlie? Sociologie d’une crise religieuse*. Here was the long-awaited critique of the Manichean reading of post-Charlie France. Todd is well-known in the country as an eccentric anti-European, left-wing academic who despite his radicalism on many issues is a very media-friendly figure. Sadly though, his grossly simplistic interpretation of the huge demonstrations of 11 January ultimately reinforced the ‘Je suis Charlie’ Manichaeism. Todd deterministically attributed those demonstrations to Catholic, upper-middle-class people in their fifties, to a peripheral France who had primarily Islamophobic, reactionary motives. As Nonna Mayer and Vincent Tiberj argued, Todd’s analysis was a gross “ecological fallacy”.<sup>33</sup> Mayer and Tiberj’s survey on post-Charlie political attitudes for the CNCDDH seems to indicate that among those most likely to demonstrate on 11 January were people without religion, practising Catholics and people who identify as Muslims. The huge media hype around

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30. See <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/les-invites-de-mediapart/article/210115/qu-est-ce-que-ca-fait-d-etre-un-probleme>

31. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 02.2015.

32. *Le Monde*, 20.01.2015.

33. *Le Monde*, 19.05.2015.

his flawed book only served among others to expose his views as simplistic and to denounce his methodology. Thanks to Todd then, one could almost be forgiven for thinking that anybody taking critical distance from the ‘Je suis Charlie’ mantra was ludicrously wrong-headed.

**Best-selling Islamophobia.** Prior to and after the January attacks, a few best-sellers with a pronounced Islamophobic character, delineating an ethnic definition of white/Christian Frenchness and buying into conspiracy theories about the Islamisation of France or Europe, hit the headlines on a mind-numbingly regular basis. The best known are Eric Zemmour’s *Le Suicide français*, Alain Finkielkraut’s *L’Identité malheureuse* and Michel Houellebecq’s novel *Soumission*. Zemmour, who was sued by anti-racist associations because he defended the deportation of Muslims back to “their home country” in an interview, allegedly sold about 5,000 copies of his book a day in late 2014, a few weeks before the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Finkielkraut, a media-savvy intellectual, has been at the centre of a national debate, following the publication of *L’Identité malheureuse*, in which he warned of the dangers to French national identity from mass immigration and multiculturalism; as Sudhir Hazareesingh has argued,<sup>34</sup> Finkielkraut is a typical reactionary pundit in France since he almost never leaves the very posh Paris arrondissements but spends a great deal of time denouncing French banlieues he knows nothing about. This is also the point made in the text by nine Muslim scholars (“How Does It Feel To Be a Problem?”).

It is impossible to tell whether these few bestselling authors create or reflect public opinion, and one always should beware of media-centrism, i.e. the belief that the media form public opinion. What is sure is that, as the graph below indicates, Islamophobia is a major business asset for publishing houses going through a real crisis. The total sales of these books amounts to 1,022,448 as of mid December 2015, against a total of 49,980 for books sympathetic to Muslims in France,<sup>35</sup> or which purport to analyse Islamophobia in the country. All of the below titles were published by major presses, except for *Islamophobie: la contre-enquête*. The book has sold little, but this laughably flawed essay by two journalists having nothing to do with the study of Muslims or Islam (Isabelle Kersimon wrote a book on tackling obesity!) was regularly seen in mainstream Paris bookshops on end-aisle displays. Notice, too, the reasonable success enjoyed by Edwy Plénel’s pamphlet *Pour les musulmans*, a passionate defence of Muslims by the former editor in chief of *Le Monde*. These sales, though, pale into insignificance when compared with Islamophobic juggernauts by Zemmour, Finkielkraut and Houellebecq.

34. Op. cit., 349.

35. The titles in red are broadly Islamophobic, although Islamophobia may not be the only theme developed in these books; titles in blue take issue with Islamophobia. The sales figures have been provided to the author by Edistat, a company calculating general sales throughout the country (corporate bookshops, independent bookshops, supermarkets selling books). They run up to 20 December, 2015.

Author	Title	Translated title	Publication date	Sales as of 15.12.2015
Eric Zemmour	Le Suicide français	The French Suicide	01.10.2014	289,985
Alain Finkielkraut	L'Identité Malheureuse	The Unhappy Identity	09.10.2013	112,809
Michel Houellebecq	Soumission	Submission	07.01.2015	554,537
Caroline Fourest	Eloge du Blasphème	In Praise of Blasphemy	29.04.2015	33,017
Charb	Lettre aux escrocs de l'islamophobie qui font le jeu des racistes	Letter to the Islamophobia Cheats Who Are Fuelling Racism	16.04.2015	31,576
Isabelle Kersimon & Jean-Christophe Moreau	Islamophobie : la contre-enquête	Islamophobia: The Counter-Investigation	23.10.2014	524
Abdellali Hajjat & Marwan Mohamed	Islamophobie : comment les élites françaises fabriquent le problème musulman	Islamophobia: How the French Elites are Fabricating the Muslim Problem	26.09.2013	2,920
Edwy Plénel	Pour les musulmans	For the Muslims	18.09.2014	44,092
Claude Askolovitch	Nos mal-aimés : ces musulmans dont la France ne veut pas	The Unloved Among Us: Those Muslims that France Doesn't Want	18.09.2013	2,968

## SINCE THE STATE OF EMERGENCY (13 NOVEMBER) GOT INTRODUCED

**The usual suspects.** As has become routine in the wake of Jihadist terrorist attacks in Western countries, politicians and some media have summoned Muslims to unambiguously criticise the attacks. Understandably, the repetition of such summons has irritated a growing number of Muslims. To receive these orders to criticise such deeds hurt many, who felt that yet again the doings of a tiny minority gave a bad name to the whole Muslim group. Hassane Oufkir (Lille, Lycée Averroès) states that “our jobs, our contribution shows we have nothing to do with those people”.<sup>36</sup> Hatem Nafti, a consultant who lives in Paris very close to the places where the shooting occurred on 13 November, published an open letter to Alain Juppé, a right-wing leader who was President Chirac’s Prime Minister (1995-1997). Juppé had just declared that “the Muslims must clearly say that they don’t want this sort of religion”. Hatem Nafti insists on the very frequent use of the verb *se désolidariser* (to break with) which implies a former alliance, agreement of sorts. This, Nafti says, is deeply hurtful: one reason is that there were Muslims, and practising ones, among the victims. But even that argument is dismissed by others, among whom Oufkir, who says that the ‘Muslims among the victims argument’ is invoked as though Muslims had to hear about this fact in order to be overtly critical of horrendous acts against fellow human beings. Mes-

36. Interview, 17.12.2015.

kiné Daouh, the head teacher at École de la Réussite (‘Achievement School’, north of Paris) is much saddened that though often with the best of intentions, “certain imams are belly-dancing to the media, falling into the trap”<sup>37</sup> that contributes to a further stigmatisation of a very heterogeneous group. Worryingly, public institutions partake of such stereotyping, for instance in the Seine-Saint-Denis area. There, on 30 January and then 19 November, all Muslim associations were called in by the administrative office (prefecture) and were told to publicly criticise these terrorist attacks. The Pantin Mosque (north of Paris) president laments that “we were about to do it by ourselves, but the mere fact of being told to do so by public authorities instantaneously labels us as suspect”.<sup>38</sup>

**Targeting mosques and imams.** Probably in order to placate a restive French public opinion, French police forces have raided numerous mosques and Muslim associations. It is noteworthy that in some cases (Pontoise, Lagny-sur-Marne near Paris, Arbresle and Vénissieux in and near Lyon) some places labelled as ‘closed mosques’ were merely prayer rooms, generally closed with flimsy justifications, or for technical reasons (unregistered renting of premises, etc.) having little or nothing to do with the actual radicalisation of regular attendants. The closing of the Gennevilliers Mosque (northwest of Paris) offers a very interesting case in point: nothing was really found in it, but public authorities had wanted to make the place into an impoundment lot since 2010, and the mosque is strategically located at the port of Paris, thus making it dangerous in the hypothetical event of a radicalisation. The mere fact that Cherif Kouachi, one of the key architects of the January Charlie Hebdo attack, had lived in Gennevilliers and did not attend the mosque is already a hint that radicalised Muslims in the area were not attracted to the place.

In the eyes of the most Islamophobic activists in France, those raids and closures seem to legitimate a free-for-all against mosques. In 2015, at least 63 attacks against mosques have been recorded, all across the country: seven were the objects of arson, four were totally or partially destroyed and three terrorist attacks against them have been avoided. Corsica, where six incidents have been recorded, is the region with the greatest number of attacks.<sup>39</sup> There, as we have seen above, Islamophobia takes a sinister dimension, fuelled as it is by a very defensive, anti-Arab Corsican nationalism at grassroots level.<sup>40</sup>

To be sure, some spectacular raids will be counter-productive in the long run: some of those who saw how the doors to the Aubervilliers Mosque (north of Paris)

37. Interview, 22.12.2015.

38. Interview, 17.12.2015.

39. For further details, <http://www.desdomeetdesminarets.fr/2015/12/27/au-moins-63-mosquees-ont-ete-visees-par-des-actes-islamophobes-en-2015-la-liste-complete/>

40. Marie Peretti N’Diaye, *Le Racisme en Corse, quotidienneté, spécificité, exemplarité* (Bastia: Albiana), 2014.

were smashed to gain access to a building for which a key could have been used and where nothing was eventually found claimed that the French state was paving the way for terrorist attacks to take place in ten years' time.<sup>41</sup> More generally, the closures of prayer rooms in regions where praying space is pathetically limited will more deeply entrench among Muslims the feeling of being second-class citizens: such is particularly the case in the southeast, where prayer rooms in Drap, Beausoleil and Nice were raided and closed for administrative reasons. In Nice, a large, brand new mosque (An-Nour Islamic Centre) to be inaugurated soon was pre-empted in late December by Mayor Christian Estrosi in order to make the building into a day nursery. The same had happened in Mantes-La-Ville on 29 June, where the Front National mayor made the very same pre-emption decision, which has sparked a litigation battle. All in all, in the month that followed the attacks of 13 November, 25 mosques or prayer rooms were raided, 10 were closed and 1 was destroyed (Vénissieux, east of Lyon). Virtually nothing of interest was found.

**A very unsecular control of sermons.** The C.F.C.M. (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman), which was founded in 2013, illustrates the French government's willingness to deal with an official institution representing the wrongly-termed 'Muslim community' in the country. Like the Muslim Council for Britain across the channel, the C.F.C.M. has been criticised by Muslims since its foundation. And yet for political as well as media elites it has been seen as a key 'representative'. Its leaders have been only too happy to act as intermediaries between the state authorities and the bulk of Muslims. But they are secular figures with many of their connections abroad (Algeria, Morocco) and not enough links with the grassroots. It therefore came as a surprise when Anouar Kbibech, its president, left the Home Ministry on 1 December and declared that henceforth, the C.F.C.M. would certify the imams and make sure that the certified ones would only deliver peace-loving, non-radical sermons. Interestingly, among the first to react were Muslims from the Indian Ocean island of La Réunion, which prides itself on having the oldest mosque in any French département. Houssen Amode, a local Muslim leader, regrets that this decision had not been discussed beforehand, before making it clear that "if a change is introduced which leads to some form of outside tutelage, we won't accept it", and that "it is the state's prerogative to look for a representative to deal with, but this state that promotes secularism is not supposed to interfere in the organisation of a specific faith".<sup>42</sup> The French state is therefore walking a political tightrope, torn between the legitimate necessity to clamp down on extremist sermons and the legitimate Muslim claim that the

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41. Interview, M'Hammed Henniche, 17.12.2015.

42. L'info.re, 26.11.2015, see <http://www.linfo.re/la-reunion/societe/681738-des-imams-certifies-la-reponse-de-houssen-amode>

government, via the C.F.C.M., is certainly not meant to remote-control sermons. What compounds this situation is that the C.F.C.M. has precious little expertise in Muslim theology. Its current leader, Anouar Kbibech, works as an engineer for a major telecom corporation (SFR) and its former leader, Dalil Boubakeur, is primarily a general practitioner, though also the rector of the Paris Mosque. Understandably, such credentials impress but few imams across the country.

## CONCLUSION

The attacks carried out on 13 November caused 130 deaths. They were unprecedented in France since 1945. After the Charlie Hebdo attacks, some police vans were seen outside certain mosques (even in Seine Saint-Denis, which is something of a comfort zone for many Muslims) to protect Muslims from Islamophobic assaults. Since the Bataclan attacks though, the police have been raiding the very same mosques (Pantin, Aubervilliers, Gennevilliers) they had been protecting ten months earlier. This speaks volumes about the French government's change of appreciation: from potential victims to be sheltered, most Muslims have now become suspects. Manuel Valls epitomises this U-turn most patently: whereas he had referred to a "social apartheid" in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, by mid November he made it clear that what had just happened had no "social, sociological or cultural excuses".<sup>43</sup> Instead of looking into the systemic roots of radicalisation (overcrowded prisons, academic under-achievement within working-class areas, discrimination on the job market), or in ideological ones (a faithless environment in which the one available 'romantic' cause on the market of ideas is Jihad, to quote Olivier Roy),<sup>44</sup> the French state has decided to suggest, rather than to state explicitly, that the real problem is in the nature of Islam itself, illustrated in radical imams, mosques having something to hide, or mainstream Muslims that baulk at embracing laïcité. But the truth of the matter is a tedious list of French Jihadists born and bred in what are often the most run-down banlieues in the country. Among the high-profile cases in 2015 and the few years before: Mohamed Merah from a Zone Urbaine Sensible<sup>45</sup> in Toulouse; Amedy Coulybaly from another Z.U.S. south of Paris; Ismaël Omar Mostefaï from another Z.U.S. also south of Paris; Foued-Mohamed Aggad from a Z.U.S. in Strasbourg; Hasna Aït Boulahcen from a Z.U.S. north of Paris and in the east of the country; Mehdi Nemmouche from yet another Z.U.S. in Roubaix, in the north of France. This boring litany could of course go on. The only exceptions are those born and

43. Statement made in the French *Assemblée Nationale*, 25.11.2015.

44. See the interview Valls gave to *Libération*, 03.10.2014.

45. These deserve, because of their high levels of poverty and social exclusion, to receive extra funding from the state. They concentrate about 7 % of the French population, in some 720 areas.

bred in Belgium (Molenbeek, north of Brussels), in areas wholly comparable to these listed here. Ten years after the 2005 urban disturbances in France, it is somewhat easier to expose religious problems in certain areas rather than look into the social and political causes of this worrying urban wound at the heart of the French Republic. As the year drew to a close, François Hollande confirmed he would move on with the introduction of a dual-nationality plan to strip citizenship from binationals convicted of terrorism. A few weeks after his party had actively campaigned in favour of a republican bulwark against the Front National in the regional elections, the French president promoted a largely inefficient dent into the Republic championed so far only by the Front National. The year 2015 therefore ended on a fairly ominous note.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

A solely get-tough approach on radicalised Muslims is doomed to fail or even to be counter-productive in the long term.

The strengthening of an educational market (resting on parental choice and on a weakening of catchment areas) is doomed to further entrench the ghettoisation of French banlieues and the immense majority of French Jihadists come from such banlieues all across the country.

Discrimination on the job market (which is very harmful to French Muslim males in particular) must not only be identified but also seriously addressed, by informing companies that such practices are not in their economic interests, and if need be by imposing deterring fines on these companies.

Secularism (*laïcité*) must be unceasingly clarified as meaning: (1) the neutrality of the state and (2) freedom of religion rather than freedom from religion (or from Islam). As it is understood today *laïcité* too often serves as a respectable justification for Islamophobia.

Muslim women wearing veils: the multiplicity of reasons to wear one must urgently be acknowledged by public opinion. Scholars (especially sociologists) working on the question must be more visible than conservative pundits with little or often no knowledge of the grassroots.

Violent extremism and Jihadism must also be apprehended as issues unconnected with the question of the integration of ethnic minorities. In a Western world shorn of political causes to promote and where faith has been on the decline for many decades, Jihadism attracts a substantial proportion of French people whose names are Jean-François and Marie, not Mohamed or Samira.<sup>46</sup>

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46. Anthropologist Dounia Bouzar, whose consulting agency is paid by the government to deradicalise Muslims coming back from Syria ([www.cpsdi.fr](http://www.cpsdi.fr)), states that she has been contacted by 847 non-Muslim families wanting some help to solve the radicalisation issue of their primarily non-Muslim children. See *Le Monde*, 29.12.2015.

The French state must learn to deal with a Muslim group having a multiplicity of voices; to obdurately insist on dealing with official representatives having little credibility among the bulk of Muslims which only serves to compound the French Muslim feeling of being misunderstood, or of being an object of discourse rather than a subject of discourse.

Public services provided to Muslims (from state-financed Muslim schools to imams in prisons) must be further improved urgently; it is only through such improvements that the feeling of being second-class citizens will be efficiently addressed. Quite a few Jihadists have become radicalised in prison where religious offer is lacking.



Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism poses a growing threat to the democratic foundations of European constitutions and social peace as well as the coexistence of different cultures throughout Europe. Both civil society actors and states should acknowledge the seriousness of this issue and develop concrete policies to counter Islamophobia.

As the leading think tank in Turkey, SETA felt an urgent need to address this problem. In fact, there are still people denying the very existence of racism against Muslims. Many state and civil society institutions, from the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to the countless civil society organisations throughout Europe, have done priceless work to prove and establish the opposite. Yet, institutions like the FRA publish only irregular reports on a restricted number of countries while most civil society organisations tackle racism in general and only few focus on Islamophobia in particular -this is the urgent gap our report wishes to fill.

The European Islamophobia Report (EIR) is an annual report, which is presented for the first time this year. It currently comprises 25 national reports regarding each state and the tendencies of Islamophobia in each respective country. The current report features the work of 37 extraordinary scholars. In the years to come we will attempt to cover even more countries. This report aims to enable policymakers as well as the public to discuss the issue of Islamophobia with the help of qualitative data. At the same time, several of its unique characteristic features make a difference to the current state of the debate on Islamophobia. Studies on Islamophobia have in the past predominantly concentrated on Western Europe. This is especially the case with reports focusing on Islamophobia. The EIR is the first to cover a wide range of Eastern European countries like Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia. This will enrich the debate on racism in general and Islamophobia in Europe in particular.

## About SETA

Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) is a non-profit research institute based in Turkey dedicated to innovative studies on national, regional and international issues. SETA is the leading think tank in Turkey and has offices in Ankara, Istanbul, Washington D.C. and Cairo. The objective of SETA is to produce up-to-date and accurate knowledge and analyses in the fields of politics, economy, and society, and inform policy makers and the public on changing political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Through research reports, publications, brain storming sessions, conferences and policy recommendations, SETA seeks to guide leaders in government, civil society, and business, and contributes to informed decision making mechanisms.



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