

FRANCE: An Algerian imam faces deportation

HRWF (15.04.2018) – The French government is trying to expel El Hadi Doudi, an imam preaching a fundamentalist form of Islam contrary to human rights. On 8 March, a Commission composed of administrative and judicial magistrates opened the way to the deportation of the controversial imam after it identified cases of hate speech in the numerous sermons of the imam. Jews are “unclean, the brothers of monkeys and pigs,” he said. Adulterers “must be punished by stoning to death or decapitation,” while women “must not leave the home without authorization.” The apostate “needs to be eliminated by the death penalty, to protect Muslims.” Most damning, the Commission report said, Imam Doudi “explicitly” justified jihad.



El Hadi Doudi, an imam who preaches a fundamentalist form of Islam, at a courthouse in Marseille, France, in February. The French

*government is trying to expel him. Credit Anne-Christine
Poujoulat/Agence France-Presse – Getty Images*

Imam Doudi, 63 was born in Algeria and is not a French citizen. As he is very active on internet, his influence extends not only in France but also throughout Europe. His lawyer said he is the only imam authorized to issue fatwas. Over 37 years, he has often criticized Jews, women and the modern world, yet former governments have long tolerated his hard-line sermons. President Macron is adopting a tougher line, especially about hate speech.

However, France had never been lax in its fight against extremism and terrorism. From 2012 to 2015, the then Interior Ministry kicked out 40 Muslim clerics, and another 52 people, including clerics, were also deported over the last 28 months.

“It’s not just the terrorist organizations, the armies of Daesh, the imams of hate and death that we are fighting,” Mr. Macron said, referring to the Islamic State, in a speech last week honoring Lt. Col. Arnaud Beltrame, a police officer who died in terrorist attack at a supermarket in southern France after swapping himself with a hostage.

“What we are fighting is also this subterranean Islamism, which advances through social networks, which accomplishes its task invisibly, which works silently on the weak and the unstable, betraying even those it claims to represent, who, on our very soil, indoctrinate through proximity and daily corrupt,” Mr. Macron said.

The expulsion of Imam Doudi was recommended by the Marseille authorities under a French law regarding “deliberate acts tending to provoke discrimination, hatred and violence toward an individual or a group.”

Marseille – France’s second-largest city, one-fifth Muslim – is not especially radicalized. Other cities in the south of France, like Nice, have had higher numbers of young people

leave to fight in Syria, and greater proportion of Muslim residents on the government's terrorism watchlist. However, almost all of the fines in Marseille for wearing a face-covering, head-to-toe veil – which is illegal in France – have been imposed in the vicinity of Imam Douidi's mosque, the police say. The authorities are growing increasingly concerned about the potential for radicalization – especially since two young women were killed in a knife attack at the city's main train station in October.

The Sounna mosque where Imam Douidi preached, on the Boulevard National in the Third Arrondissement of Marseille, was closed by officials in December on the grounds that his sermons could “provoke acts of terrorism.” Five members of Imam Douidi's flock left to fight jihad in Syria, according to the police.

His sermons are “exactly contrary to the values of the Republic,” said Marseille's prefect of police, Olivier de Mazières, a terrorism specialist who has led the case against the cleric.

70,000 law enforcement forces for the protection of places of worship at Easter

HRWF (02.04.2018) – 41,000 policemen and 29,000 gendarmes were mobilized by the Ministry of the Interior to protect Christian and Jewish places of worship during the religious celebrations of Easter and until 7 April, according to a press release published by the Ministry on 30 March (<https://bit.ly/2pVGGHY>).

State of emergency

In 2017, 20 terrorist attempts were foiled, according to Gérard Collomb, Minister of the Interior. During the state of emergency from November 2015 to 1 November 2017, 32 attempts were foiled, 4457 administrative searches were carried out at the address of individuals having relations with jihadist movements, 625 weapons were discovered (including 78 war weapons: Kalashnikovs, assault rifles and rocket launchers). This led to 998 criminal investigations, 646 custody cases. 752 individuals were put under house arrest and 41 still are. When suspects were under house arrest, they had to stay at home from 8pm to 6am, report to the police or the gendarmerie two or three times per day, and were not allowed to leave their city without the authorization of the mayor or the prefect. During the state of emergency, 19 Muslim places of worship suspected of hosting preachers spreading hate speeches were closed and as of 1 April 11 were still closed. Their situation is still under investigation, minister Collomb said.

Anti-terrorism law

After 1 November 2017, the lawmakers passed an anti-terrorist law meant to replace the legislation in force during the state of emergency. Under the new law, the prefect is still allowed to order administrative searches but only after consulting a prosecutor and after the decision has been validated by a judge.

The prefect is still authorized to close places of worship if they propagate ideas, theories, oral statements and printed material inciting to violence, hatred, discrimination, terrorism or apology of terrorism. However, France has decided that the closure of places of worship was not a priority in its fight against Islamist terrorism because what was pointed at was the lack of a global strategy of prevention involving local actors – associative, social, educational, cultural and police – to put on the radar all weak signals of

radicalization.

House arrests are replaced by “individual measures of surveillance”. Freedom of movement is extended from the place of residence to the commune and it can be extended to the département if the suspect accepts to wear an electronic bracelet.

Controls of personal identification documents are possible without prior authorization of a judicial authority at the border, near and in train stations, within a 20-km radius from international ports and airports.

Deportation of foreign dangerous Islamists remains possible. According to governmental sources, more than 60 people have been deported since 2012.

Protection of places of worship during the state of emergency

According to statistics from the Interior Ministry, published on 1 February 2017, 4,320 places of worship and religious community buildings were under surveillance and protection of mobile (non-static) patrols by law enforcement and military forces in 2016:

- 2,400 out of 45,000 Christian sites (5%)
- 1,100 out of 2500 Muslim sites (44%)
- 820 Jewish synagogues, schools and community centers (100%)

Moreover, in the last two years, a budget of 12.5 million EUR was approved to purchase security and video-protection material for the most sensitive religious sites.

Noteworthy is the fact that soldiers who were protecting religious buildings were targets of physical attacks. On 3rd February 2015, three soldiers guarding a Jewish community center were targeted in a knife attack in Nice, and on 1st January 2016, a man tried to run down troops guarding a mosque in Valence.

In 2016, incidents targeting Jewish and Muslim community

buildings respectively decreased by 54% and 37.5% in comparison with 2015 while there was an increase of 17.4% concerning Christian (Catholic) places of worship[1]: 949 according to the Ministry of the Interior, including 399 acts of vandalism and 191 cases of theft of worship items.[2]

The Ministry of the Interior also notes that 14 incidents were satanist motivated, and in 25 cases there was an anarchist connotation, but most of the time the perpetrators and their motivations are unknown.

These statistical ups and downs follow the same trend as the global statistics about anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian incidents.

Decrease of racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents in 2016 and 2017

After a continuous increase from 2008 to 2015, the number of vandalism incidents targeting Christian and Muslim graves and places of worship decreased in 2016 and in 2017 but violent acts against Jews were on the rise and vandalism cases against Jewish sites increased by 22% in comparison with 2016, according to the Ministry of the Interior.

The global statistics in 2017 are clear: 950 racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents in 2017 v. 1128 in 2016 (-16%).

The number of anti-Muslim incidents (121) dramatically decreased by 34.5%.

The number of racist incidents (518) dropped by 14.8%.

The number of anti-Semitic incidents (311) diminished by 7.2%.

However, the number of acts of violence against Jews has dramatically increased: 97 in 2017 v. 77 in 2016.

Concerning acts of vandalism against religious sites and

graves, Christian sites were less targeted: 878 in 2017 v. 949 in 2016, and Muslim sites were also less targeted: 72 in 2017 v. 85 in 2016.

FRANCE: THE CROSS OF A STATUE OF LATE POPE MUST BE REMOVED, A FRENCH COURT SAYS

EURACTIV/ AFP (03.11.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2ytNaUX> – More than 38,000 people signed an online petition as of Thursday protesting against a French court order to remove a cross from a statue of the late Polish-born Pope John Paul II in Brittany, western France.

The petition, launched on the CitizenGo website four days ago, “opposes the removal of the cross from a public space and emphasises the Christian roots of Europe”.

It is addressed to the European Parliament, the centre-right European People’s Party and the European Court of Human Rights.

Controversy erupted last week when France’s top administrative court gave the town of Ploermel six months to remove the cross above a papal statue in a public square in a bid to comply with laws enforcing the secular nature of public spaces.

Although the statue of the late pontiff itself is not in question, the court’s move drew ire in heavily Roman Catholic Poland where the Polish-born saint is widely revered and religious symbols are not restricted by law.

Rightwing Prime Minister Beata Szydlo offered last weekend to

move the statue to Poland to “save it from censorship”, calling John Paul II “a great European” symbolising a “united Christian Europe”.

Szydło added that “the dictate of the political correctness – the secularisation of the state – opens the door to values that are culturally alien to us and that lead to Europeans being terrorised in their daily lives”.

Gifted to Ploermel by the Georgian-born Russian artist Zourab Tseretel, the statue which features a cross on the arch framing it, was installed in a public square in October 2006.

A local citizens group then launched a legal drive to remove the cross citing a century-old French law on the separation of church and state, but the town’s mayor refused.

After years of legal wrangling, France’s top administrative court ruled last Wednesday that the cross must go in line with the 1905 law that rules out “raising or affixing any religious sign or emblem” in a “public place”.

The court’s decision also drew protests from representatives of the Roman Catholic church in France while conservative French lawmaker Nadine Morano said Wednesday she was launching a separate petition “to include the Christian roots of France in the constitution”.

In a twist, Budapest on Thursday also offered to take the statue and cover all transport costs.

The foreign ministry said its French envoy contacted authorities in Brittany but had not yet received a response.

“From the point of view of Europe’s future, any decision that aims at restricting Christianity and the removal of Christian symbols by referring in a hypocritical way to tolerance is incredibly damaging,” Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told the MTI state news agency.