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Lombardy, FOB (Freedom of Belief): "A liberty-destroying law against mosques, the right to pray is forbidden"

FOB (03.02.2015) - "A liberty-destroying law forbidding to thousands of Lombard citizens – Muslims and non- Muslims alike – the right to pray". This is how the Steering Committee of FOB (European Federation for Freedom of Belief) voices its strong disagreement about the "anti-mosques law", currently at the center of controversies in Lombardy.

"The unacceptable form of discrimination contained in the new law manifests itself in a form of religious prohibitionism, whose only outcome will be that of a "clandestine" expression of the believers' sentiment: with just one strike the proposal of the Lega Party succeeds in jeopardizing on one side security, and on the other, human rights.

To hinder this far the regulation and regularization of faiths on the territory, in fact, can only lead to lesser transparency. A decision that hits the bona-fide communities, eager to operate under the sunlight, without affecting in any way fundamentalism and extremism", continues the statement of FOB.

"In addition to infringing the right of freedom of religion and thought, the law gratuitously accentuates the disparity between the Catholic Church and the other religious denominations, to the detriment of interreligious dialogue. The obligation to install surveillance cameras in places of worship, also forces the believers to undergo a kind of monitoring of ideological nature.

After the closure of 23 Evangelic churches in 2013, today, with this further tightening, once again fruit of the moral panic against Islamic communities, Lombardy Region confirms a disturbing anti-constitutional drift, already sanctioned by the Constitutional Court with regards to the former regional law, that increasingly stands between the principle of equality of religious denominations and its effective implementation, with all the risks that this rift entails, both for the social cohesion and for the so much proclaimed security".

Milan's new 'Anti-Mosque' law

The Daily Beast (28.01.2015) - Blatant anti-Islamic racism was bound to happen sooner or later as fear continues to spread across Europe after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris. And there is nothing subtle about a new measure being considered in Italy's often-xenophobic northern regions.

This week, the northern Italian region of Lombardy passed a provisional measure to limit the building of new houses of worship for all religious entities that do not have official agreements with the Italian state. And since the only major religious entity in Italy that falls under that category is Islam, the measure is being called the "anti-mosque law."

To be fair, there is virtually no way the measure, which allows regional authorities to decide and even call a referendum before giving permission for a mosque or house of worship to be built, will pass into a nation-wide law. But the fact that it made it past the first political hurdle does call into question why Islam, the second largest religion in Italy after Catholicism, is not officially recognized by the Italian state even though religions with much smaller followers in Italy, like Judaism and the Mormon's Church of Latter Day Saints are. Religions that are recognized by the Italian state enjoy tax perks and other benefits, including greater freedom in how and where they worship. Those not recognized by the state are considered illegitimate cults. "The new rules are discriminatory and inopportune," Milan's socio-political city councilor Pierfrancesco Majorino said. "They are a punch in the face to any attempt at dialogue between cultures."

Among the many stipulations in the proposed law are regulations that would make it almost impossible for a new mosque to be built. According to the legislation passed by the Lombard regional government, any new house of worship has to have a parking lot at least twice the size of the structure itself. Considering Italy's over-crowded urban centers, that renders any conversion of existing property ultimately impossible without razing adjacent buildings, and it would mean that new structures would have to be isolated or far from urban areas in order to acquire that much land.

Another stipulation is that new houses of worship for religions not authorized by the state would have to be open to the public, even to those who do not practice the faith. They would also be required to install closed circuit cameras that would be connected to local law enforcement offices to monitor movement into and out of the structures. Another stipulation is that non-authorized religions may not disturb the peace when calling worshippers to prayer.

The proposed law is being pushed forward by the right-wing politicians in Milan's city hall, many of whom have been trying for years to stop the practice of open prayer by Muslims in front of the mosque on Viale Jenner in the financial capital, where American CIA agents famously kidnapped an Egyptian cleric in 2003.

Center-left politicians, who are in a minority in Lombardy, argued that the proposed law infringes on the basic right of freedom to worship. They say it also penalizes immigrants who are legally in the country, and who should be allowed to worship as they wish. "This measure is the result of Islamophobia," said Roberto Bruni, a center-left politician from northern Italy.

Party members for the opposition Five-Star movement, led by Beppe Grillo, called the measure dangerous. "With this law, the majority party criminalizes all 420,000 Muslims who live and work regularly in Lombardy," said Eugenio Casalino of Grillo's often radical party. "It sells the myth that preventing new mosques means more security."

Sponsors of the bill say it will instead calm fears shared by Italians and ensure that Italy's second-largest religion—which only two percent of the population practices compared to 97 percent who practice Catholicism—doesn't grow. "The presence of Muslims in Lombardy is not indispensable," said Northern League politician Roberto Anelli. "I say to anyone who doesn't like this law: go home."

The European Federation for Freedom of Belief officially incorporated

FoB press release (28.01.2015) – On the 26th of January 2015 in Rome (Italy) at str. Viale Angelico 38, the association 'European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB)' was officially incorporated.

The founders are: Prof. Pietro Nocita (Chairman), Attny. Fabrizio D'Agostini (Councillor), Dr. Raffaella Di Marzio (Secretary), Camillo Maffia (Councillor). Vice-chair is Attny. Alessandro Amicarelli. Another member of the Steering Committee is Prof. Sonia Bartol.

Freedom of Belief – FoB is a free society of culture and information independent from any party; it reaffirms the freedom of religious, philosophic and spiritual creed; it aims to the dissemination, the development and the realization of these principles within the European Community and international organisations; it protects individuals or associated people from any barrier limiting or discriminating their religious freedom; it appeals to States for the removal of any block and for the attainment of pacific and free religious choice.

According to the perspective of the Association, the actual achievement of freedom of religious creed, protecting both believers and non-believers, is a relevant element towards a pacific and universal people's alliance.

As a stakeholder NGO, the European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FoB) has been registered since 8th of December 2014 on the Official Register of Lobbies before the EU Parliament and Commission in Brussels and Strasbourg. (ID number: 761678715190-06). The organisation has members in the following countries: Denmark, France, Italy, Romania, Spain and United Kingdom.

The NGOs: Soteria International, European Coordination for Freedom of Conscience, LAYMS e AIDRL are members of FOB Federation.

Information:

<http://freedomofbelief.net>

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