

# **BELGIUM: Parliamentary report on Islamic radicalism: The Grand Mosque of Brussels in the dock**

By Willy Fautre, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (31.10.2017) – In 1968 Belgium recognized the Islamic and Cultural Centre (ICC) as the representative platform of the Muslims and Islam of Belgium. One year later, the Belgian government signed a convention granting the ICC, then represented by the ambassadors of Saudi Arabia and Morocco, the use of a building (that the Grand Mosque of Belgium [GMB] now occupies) for 99 years. In 1978, the new Islamic and Cultural Center of Belgium (CICB) was inaugurated, taking over the role of the ICC. The building complex now accommodates not only the Grand mosque but also a school, and a research and training centre on Islam and the Arabic language. For years the Grand Mosque of Brussels has been accused of propagating Wahhabism and Salafism in Belgium.

In its fourth intermediary report published on 23 October 2017, the Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry on Radicalism and Terrorism (\*) says that it first heard from Galaye N'Diaye, the GMB imam, and Jamel Saleh Momenah, director of the Cultural Islamic Centre of Brussels when beginning this report. As they did not know any of the Belgian national languages, they expressed themselves in English. Both of them denied being Wahhabis or Salafists. The GMB imam noted that he was teaching Salaf Islam, the doctrine of the first three generations of Islam, but not Salafism, another current which led to the movements in Saudi Arabia... He claimed that he was preaching a moderate Islam.

Other actors and experts heard by the commission shared a different view about the activities of the GMB. There was a consensus among them to say that the Islam promoted by the GMB and the CICB is from the Wahhabi-Salafist current with a strong influence of the worldview of the Muslim Brotherhood. The doctrine of the Wahhabi-Salafists is literalist in its interpretation of the sacred texts, extremely normative culturally and exclusivist concerning other visions of Islam. Their conception of Islam refuses any compromise and claims total engagement of their adherents. It rejects "the others" who do not share it and creates a ghetto mentality. It rejects Sufism, the saints' worship, esoteric currents, the juridical schools and doctrines that have their own particularities in the interpretation of the Quran. The Wahhabi-Salafist project has political objectives at the national and international level. In Belgium it aims to unify the various Sunni communities around their interpretation of Islam.

Concerning the respect of human rights, the representatives of the GMB and the CICB answered "Obviously, we will always respect Belgian laws. This has always been one of our priorities." However, when asked about the compatibility between the Cairo Declaration (asserting the supremacy of the sharia) and the European Convention on human rights, they said they did not know the European Convention but they would examine it without any delay... However, according to experts heard by the commission, the rejection of certain universal values is consubstantial with the Islam taught by that mosque as, by definition, they rely on the divine laws from which sharia proceeds.

According to the GMB/CICB representatives, their teachers come from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Senegal, and Gambia, amongst other places. They train future theologians, not imams, and for those who want to study Islam in Saudi Arabia, the ambassador, who is the president of the CICB, is instrumental in providing them with a visa. It is not

difficult to imagine what sort of Islam and sharia they want to learn and will learn in Saudi Arabia before coming back to Belgium.

In the past, the CICB was in charge of designating teachers for the Muslim classes in public schools in Belgium and also organized the massive distribution of writings on Islam with a radical connotation. This has resulted in a significant impact on Islam in Belgium and on many Muslims. Since the 1990s, the Executive of the Muslims of Belgium (EMB) has been in charge of the Muslim religion classes in public schools.

The GMB and the CICB continue to play a key role in the life of many Muslims in Belgium. The permits issued to those who slaughter animals for religious purposes, the registration of conversions to Islam, and the distribution of grants are still among the privileged competences that the GMB and CICB hold.

The average annual budget of the CICB/GMB for the last four years was approximately 1,433,000 EUR (which does not include donations in nature): 65% to 75% of their budget comes from the controversial World Islamic League (WIL) which has its seat in Saudi Arabia and whose Secretary General is the former Minister of Justice of Saudi Arabia...

Last but not least, the GMB has never asked to be officially recognized by the Belgian State. This unwillingness raises a number of concerns among the members of the Belgian Parliament as many areas in its activities remain opaque and outside the control of the authorities.

(\*) Full report in French/ Dutch at

<http://www.dekamer.be/FLWB/PDF/54/1752/54K1752009.pdf>

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