

# France: Muslim leader urges Macron not to meddle too much in French Islam

By Julie Carriat

Reuters (14.02.2018) – <http://reut.rs/2EI6vnu> – A leading representative of French Muslims urged Emmanuel Macron not to meddle in the organization of France's second-largest religion, days after the president said he would try to redefine relations between Islam and the state.

The rebuke came from the leader of an organization set up 15 years ago in a bid to defuse concern about radical preachers and foster a more homegrown form of Islam that would fit better with France's traditional separation of church and state affairs.

"Everyone must stick to their role," Ahmet Ogras, president of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), told Reuters in an interview.

"The Muslim faith is a religion and, as such, takes care of its own household affairs. The last thing you want is the state to act as guardian," said Ogras, a Frenchman of Turkish descent who has led the CFCM since mid-2017.

Macron, elected last May after a runoff victory over far-right leader Marine Le Pen, said in a Feb. 11 newspaper interview he planned to revisit the way Islam was overseen.

"What I'd like to get done in the first half of 2018 is set down markers on the entire way in which Islam is organized in France," he told the Journal du Dimanche. The priority would be to "bring back what secularism is all about".

Traditionally Catholic France is home to the largest Jewish

and Muslim communities in Europe, with the latter estimated at five million out of a population of 67 million.

The official rule is strict separation between religion and state, with the former considered a strictly private matter. The rule that has been used to justify bans on the wearing of Muslim veils by public service employees as well as any wearing of fully concealing head-to-toe veils in public places.

Macron has been under pressure to deal firmly with radical preachers and mosques since a wave of attacks in which Islamist militants killed more than 230 people in France since 2015.

Emergency search-and-arrest powers introduced in the wake of the November 2015 attacks that killed 130 people in Paris have since been made permanent under tougher security legislation. Several mosques have been shut and imams expelled.

Macron's declarations in the Feb. 11 newspaper interview suggest he is considering a profound reorganization of the way in which the Islam faith is funded and its preachers schooled.

Back in 2003, Nicolas Sarkozy, interior minister at the time and president from 2007 to 2012, engineered an agreement among the country's main Islamic groups to create the CFCM.

The idea was to have a council to speak for Muslims similar to the way the French Bishops' Conference speaks for Catholics or the Consistory speaks for Jews.

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