

FRANCE: Street prayer in Clichy : Radical Islam v. moderate Islam

HRWF (14.11.2017) – Over the past nine months, hundreds of Muslims have occupied the public space in front of the city hall in Clichy-la-Garenne for their Friday prayer because they were allegedly left without any place of worship by the municipality. The reality is however more complex as there are already two large mosques in the city that could host the protesting Muslims.

France is a secular country and does not finance any religion. The two mosques in Clichy (a city of 60,000 inhabitants within a 3km² area) are run by the “Conseil Français du Culte Musulman” (CFCM) which is an official interlocutor of the French state. Their imams are educated in France and respect the secular character of the country.

In 2013, the then mayor of Clichy rented a municipal building for a short time to a Muslim Salafist-oriented association that is not and does not wish to be affiliated with the CFCM. The new mayor elected in 2015, Remi Muzeau, decided instead to use that municipal building to host a media center, but the association refused to leave the premises.

On 22 March 2017, after a decision of the Council of State, the mayor expelled the association from the building with the help of the police. He proposed another 2000 m² administrative building to the association, but they turned it down. Its members then started to hold prayer meetings with a megaphone on the street outside the city hall every Friday, blocking the traffic, and angering the local residents and shopkeepers. Moreover, some Arabic-speaking Muslims noted that hate speech

was sometimes used by the association's preachers.

On 10 November, the mayors of the 36 municipalities composing the Haut-de-Seine *departement* gathered in front of the street praying group and sang the national anthem "La Marseille" to protest against the use of the public road for a religious service.

In a debate on the French TV channel FRANCE24 on 11 October, the President of the Mosques of the Hauts-de-Seine (CFCM), who has good relations with the mayor of Clichy, condemned the mismanagement of the situation by the association and its use of street praying as a form of protest (See a video of one of their street prayers at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=4ZojWRngW0A). He said he did not know the preachers, and, in his official function, he is unable to solve the problem.

The mayor said there are no more plots of land available in Clichy and that the association would not be able to buy one anyway because they still owe 25,000 EUR to the city and 25,000 EUR to the state. The mayor called on the state and the Minister of the Interior to find a solution.

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