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European Court (ECHR): Foreign terrorists invoke human rights to stay in Europe

European Center for Law and Justice (27.05.2020) - Is it not paradoxical that ISIS terrorists invoke "human rights" to be allowed to return in Europe, or not to be expelled from it, even though they hate the European culture and have fought against it, to the point of being guilty of war crimes and genocide? Such cases are multiplying before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

The ECLJ intervened in two of them, to bring an interpretation of human rights that is not naïve while remaining firm on the principles.

On this occasion, the ECLJ has just published a new Report ([in French only](#)) on the conditions to revoke the nationality of terrorists.

In one of these cases, an ISIS veteran, from a mixed Danish-Tunisian couple, challenges the revocation of his Danish nationality and his deportation to Tunisia, of which he is a national. In the other, an Iraqi man challenges his deportation to Iraq for organizing the financing of an Iraqi terrorist organization from Germany, where he lives with his Turkish wife and their children (His wife and his children have dual German and Turkish nationality).

With these cases, the ECHR must rule on two crucial questions:

1. Can a European state withdraw nationality and then expel a terrorist with dual nationality from Europe?

2. Can a European State expel a foreign terrorist who has founded a dual-national family on its territory?

In its written observations (available [here](#) and [there](#)), the ECLJ recalled in particular what the link of “nationality” between a person and a nation consists in: it is not a right, nor a mere administrative formality, but the expression of a bond of belonging. The ECLJ also recalled the grounds on which it must be possible to expel a foreign terrorist.

- **Withdrawing the nationality of dual-nationality terrorists**

By their actions, the ISIS terrorists voluntarily break their bond of belonging to a European people or demonstrate the non-existence of such a bond. In their case, *“the revocation of nationality merely translates, in law, a factual and material reality: that of a person who is a foreigner by his whole being”* (Bertrand Pauvert, interview for the ECLJ in French only).

Where jihadists have only one nationality, European States can only deprive them of it if it is reasonable to believe that they can acquire another nationality (*K2 v. the United Kingdom*, no. 42387/13, 7 February 2017). International and European law, on the other hand, leave a wide margin of appreciation to States to withdraw the nationality of terrorists with dual nationality, i.e., who already have another nationality.

However, the deprivation of nationality is rarely used. In France, for example, only 13 deprivations of nationality have been pronounced because of terrorist acts in twenty years (1996-2016). This political choice is dangerous. Indeed, jihadists who retain their nationality have a “right to return” to Europe and the right not to be expelled from it. On the contrary, the withdrawal of the nationality of dual nationals facilitates their expulsion as foreigners.

- **Expelling foreign terrorists**

Like any foreigner, a jihadist does not have a right to live in a country of which he or she is not, or no longer, a national.

In its observations to the European Court, the ECLJ has clarified that the possibility for a State to expel foreign terrorists pursues several legitimate objectives provided for in the Convention: to protect national security, to prevent new criminal offenses of the same kind, or to defend the rights of potential victims. Moreover, States have a duty to protect the population against terrorist threats, thus preserving common goods such as public order, national harmony, and the civil and civic spirit.

- **The ECLJ’s recommendations**

In addition to individual cases, the ECLJ has made proposals to the Court to settle disputes on the expulsion of criminal aliens.

Admittedly, the current case-law shows that the ECHR is concerned with the individual situation of foreigners and their families and the danger they pose to security. The ability of an alien threatened with expulsion to integrate is thus assessed. However, the ability of society to integrate this foreigner is totally omitted. Yet, between a foreigner and a society, the will to integrate must be mutual, like a bilateral contract.

After assessing the willingness of a foreigner threatened with expulsion to honor this

contract, it is crucial to assess the willingness of society as well. This is why the ECLJ suggested to the Court to supplement its usual approach in order to integrate the rights of society.

Other resources: *Does France have any other choice than to judge its own jihadists?* See <https://bit.ly/36GOz8p>

Expulsion of Islamist terrorists? See <https://bit.ly/2TOcAW0>

PAKISTAN: Coronavirus and Islam: Pakistani clerics refuse to shut down mosques

As Islamic clerics refuse to stop allowing religious congregations, Prime Minister Imran Khan continues to downplay the coronavirus threat to his country. Could this be a "recipe for disaster" for Pakistan?

By Haroon Janjua

DW News (31.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2UCvsbm> - Last week, Pakistani President Arif Alvi and provincial governors held a meeting with Sunni and Shiite clerics to convince them to close mosques for congregational prayers across the country amid [rapidly increasing COVID-19 cases](#) in the country. The clerics, however, rejected the request.

"We can in no way close mosques ... It is not possible in any circumstances in an Islamic country," said Muneeb-bur-Rehman, a cleric who attended the meeting.

The clerics' blatant refusal to shun collective prayers has raised doubts about Pakistan's resolve to fight the pandemic, which has killed at least 25 people in the country and infected nearly 2,000.

Earlier in March, when coronavirus cases in Pakistan were relatively lower, the federal government allowed Shiite pilgrims from Iran to return to the country through Baluchistan province.

The pilgrims were not properly quarantined, which resulted in a spike of infections. Also, the government allowed thousands of Sunni worshippers to go ahead with the "Tablighi Jamaat" congregation in Punjab province. Many of the new COVID-19 cases have emerged from that mass gathering.

Health experts say the government's measures are inadequate, fearing that the number of coronavirus cases in the South Asian country could increase exponentially in the coming weeks.

Civil society activists say that Pakistani authorities continue to appease Islamists even when the country is facing a worsening public health crisis.

Clerics' defiance

Many Pakistanis have refused to offer their prayers inside their homes, saying that religion is more important than anything else.

"I offered prayers in the mosque on Friday. More than 300 people were in attendance and it looked like a routine Friday prayer," Muhammad Ashraf, a kiosk-owner in Islamabad, told DW.

"The mosque is a safe place. I don't fear coronavirus," Ashraf said, adding that he intended to attend the next Friday prayer as well.

Many Islamic countries have shut down mosques and banned mass prayers after the emergence of coronavirus cases. [Saudi Arabia](#) even closed down Islam's holiest site, the Kaaba, and other sacred mosques to contain the spread of COVID-19. But even these examples did not deter many Pakistanis.

"The pandemic is spreading due to our sins and because we are not following the teachings of Islam," Ejaz Ashrafi, a senior cleric belonging to the Tehreek-i-Labaik (TLP) Islamist party, told DW.

Ashrafi leads the Friday prayer at a mosque in the eastern city of Lahore. "People are still going to super markets, yet the state only wants to shut down mosques. We will continue to offer prayers in the mosques," he said.

Fawad Chaudhary, the federal minister of science and technology, told media that the coronavirus is spreading in Pakistan "due to the ignorance of religious clerics." Islamist groups decried Chaudhary's statement.

Rights groups say the government must act strictly against the clerics who are defying its orders.

"The laws clearly state that anyone who deliberately spreads diseases should be imprisoned or fined. Prime Minister Imran Khan's government seems to be completely helpless," Osama Malik, an Islamabad-based legal expert, told DW.

Khan reluctant to impose a lockdown

On Monday, Prime Minister Khan spoke to the nation in a televised address (his third in the past three weeks) and argued that the country did not need a complete lockdown. He said that his government could have shut down entire cities but chose not to do it because at least 25% of the country's population would have died of hunger.

Khan's own dislike for a lockdown has emboldened those who are downplaying the virus threat to Pakistan, say experts.

Health experts say there is lack of awareness about COVID-19 among people who are not taking the disease seriously.

In contrast to Khan's "strategy," provincial chief ministers have favored the lockdown. Sindh's CM Murad Ali Shah of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has successfully implemented it to contain the virus's spread in the province. Political analysts say that the powerful Pakistani military is assisting provinces in enforcing the partial lockdown.

"Lockdown is the only way to stop the virus from spreading. The cases are expected to rise in the coming weeks if religious gatherings are not banned across the country. Clerics should understand the seriousness of the situation," Dr. Qaisar Sajjad, secretary general of Pakistan Medical Association, told DW.

SOUTH KOREA: Hundreds of Protestant Churches refuse to halt their religious services

On 23 March, the South Korean government stepped up measures to enforce its guidelines on social distancing among the public. See the "64 new cases of coronavirus on Monday, some from abroad" by Shim Kyu-seok in KoreaJoongAng Daily

KoreaJoongAng Daily (24.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2WIu7RM> - Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun in a morning health meeting warned that "stern legal action" would follow for churches in the country that have violated government orders against mass gatherings.

The remark came in response to decisions by hundreds of Protestant churches across Korea to hold services on Sunday in spite of government orders against large public gatherings.

"[Such meetings] are actions that threaten not only the individuals partaking in them but also the safety of our entire community," Chung said. "Now is a time of emergency akin to a state of war, so executive orders should not be lightly regarded as a bluff."

On 21 March, Chung issued an administrative order calling for the suspension of religious, entertainment and indoor sports activities for 15 days from Sunday through April 5 - which the prime minister said was a "critical period" to contain the coronavirus. In case the activities must be held, organizers are expected to abide by quarantine authorities' measures or be penalized.

In spite of the order, hundreds of Protestant churches across Korea held services on Sunday without following health guidelines. The Sarang Jaeil Church in northern Seoul, best known for its strong conservative leanings under its now-jailed pastor Jun Kwang-hoon, was singled out by Chung, who said the church should be subject to legal punishment for violating city ordinances banning mass rallies.

The Sarang Jaeil Church held a Sunday worship service to criticize the Moon Jae-in administration along with other right-wing groups in open defiance of the central and local government's antiviral measures. Members of the church reportedly hurled insults and shouted at public servants dispatched to observe whether health guidelines were being followed.

Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon at a press briefing on Monday called the church's actions "intolerable" and said he issued an order banning the church from holding any gatherings or services for two weeks until April 5.

"The case of the Sarang Jaeil Church constitutes an action that seriously threatens the safety of the community and threatens the [antiviral] hopes of the government and the people," Park said. "The extreme measures we have taken with regard to the Sarang Jaeil Church have nothing to do with freedom of religion, and I'm certain religious leaders will understand."

The KCDC on Monday further warned of false information circulating with regard to the virus, noting in particular a cluster of cases at a church in Gyeonggi where worshippers'

mouths were sprayed with a saltwater solution and a case in which a person became sick after industrial alcohol was used for disinfection purposes.

"Incorrect information that has not been verified medically can be even more dangerous than the virus, so it is important to check whether the source of that information is trustworthy," Jung said.

A White Paper about the Coronavirus and Shincheonji Church: Sorting fact from fiction

HRWF (25.03.2020) - The whole world is currently facing a coronavirus pandemic that originated in China and quickly expanded to South Korea where a church was demonized for allegedly spreading the virus throughout the country, the Brussels-based NGO *Human Rights Without Frontiers* recently declared in a press release.

A 30-page White Paper has just been published in five languages by a prominent scholar in religious studies, human rights activists, a reporter and a lawyer who have researched this phenomenon in South Korea. Distinguishing fact from fiction was their sole objective. After a thorough investigation, they have de-constructed about 20 biased and false stories, among many others, concerning the Shincheonji Church and have opposed facts to these fake news.

INDIA: Religious freedom is not illimited - Kerala, celebrations of mass despite bans: priest arrested

By Nirmala Carvalho

Asia News (24.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3bupjU9> - Fr. Pauly Padayatty was later released on bail. Police arrested other people who participated in rallies and processions in temples and mosques. Card. Gracias celebrates online and makes new arrangements for funerals and confessions.

A Catholic priest was arrested yesterday by the Kerala police for celebrating mass, despite the strict provisions issued by the authorities to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in India. Later Fr. Pauly Padayatty, from the diocese of Irinjalakkuda, publicly apologized and was released on bail.

The state of Kerala has ordered the closure of the places of worship but has not prohibited religious services, which can only be celebrated in the presence of the sacristan. For its part, the Episcopal Council of Kerala has issued a circular asking parishes to avoid large gatherings for mass. The rites are allowed, provided that the safety distance is respected and less than 50 people participate. In particular, the bishops ask children and the elderly not to leave the house and watch the mass online.

Padayatty, 58, is the parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Koodapuzha. A priest from his diocese said that a family asked him to celebrate the funeral of a relative. The priest asked to respect the allowed limit of participants, but then in the end more than 100 people showed up. Therefore, the police arrested him for the high concentration of faithful and reported 50 other people.

In India, the number of reported coronavirus cases is 492 and with nine deaths. In other areas of Kerala the police have blocked religious gatherings in temples and mosques: in Kannur police filed a complaint against a temple and five mosques; in Malayinkeezhu they arrested 28 people who participated in a procession in a Hindu temple. However, on social media, images of crowded meetings abound, especially of Hindu politicians.

Card. Oswald Gracias, archbishop of Mumbai and president of the Indian Bishops' Conference (CBCI), suspended all masses, meetings with the clergy, priestly ordinations as well as the Chrism mass. He is celebrating mass online every morning at 7.30am. Yesterday the cardinal released a video message to the priests of his territory, inviting them to take "wise and prudent behavior for our people".

He asks priests not to expose themselves to the risk of contagion and stay home for the next two weeks, which will be the most crucial in terms of spreading the virus. He asks to minimize the staff of the parishes, and at the same time not to reduce the wages. Then he sets directives for funerals and confessions: for the first, he blocks the masses in memory of the deceased and invites to celebrate funeral rituals at the cemetery and with very few people, with prior notice from the authorities. For the latter, he warns that there are no conditions; however, general absolutions can be conceived for coronavirus patients and remote catechesis on the need for repentance for the remission of sins.

ROMANIA: Religious freedom is not illimited

Dozens of people from Cluj shared the same spoon in the city center at a service organized by the Romanian Orthodox Church. See the video.

<https://www.facebook.com/Emanuel.Ungureanu.USR/videos/289333982051000/>

Monitorul.ro (22.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3abXD6e> - The priests and the monks from the Metropolitan Catering of Cluj-Napoca do not heed the recommendations of the authorities and have continued the celebration of the Holy Mass in the city center. Dozens of people from Cluj shared the same teaspoon, disregarding the hygiene rules recommended by the authorities.

The coronavirus pandemic killed more than 13,000 people, but people continue the habit of waiting in line without any concern for the dreaded COVID-19 virus. In Italy 17 priests died of COVID-19 virus.

MALDIVES: Islamic State-inspired knife attack exposes the vulnerability of the Maldives

By Animesh Roul

The James Town Foundation (25.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2vAnsO3> - The image of the Maldives as a tropical paradise received a significant jolt on February 4, when three foreign nationals—two Chinese and one Australian—were stabbed and injured by Islamist militants near the Hulhumale Redbull Park Futsal Ground in the country's North Male

Atoll. The incident happened amid growing concerns about secret extremist networks inspired by transnational jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) that are active in the country.

The hitherto unknown extremist media outlet al-Mustaqim released a video message on February 5, shortly after the stabbings, featuring three unidentified masked men. The nearly three-minute video message was in the local Dhivehi language with a couple of Quranic verses in Arabic. However, the video has English subtitles claiming responsibility for the knife attacks, stating, "We announce to you that we claim responsibility for the recent stabbings of tourists [in the Maldives]." It further states that "the portrayal that this [Maldives] is paradise [...] has become a mirage. From now on, the only thing they [foreign travelers] will taste [in the Maldives] is fire" ([Twitter.com/nautymatox](https://twitter.com/nautymatox), February 5).

This short video was shared on multiple social media platforms and warned of future violence and heavily criticized the Maldivian government and its leaders as "apostates." While inciting Maldivians to take up arms for retribution, the message urged them to "stand up against the oppression of Muslims." It also accused the Maldivian government of causing distress to Muslims only to please "the *taghout* (unbelievers) from America, the West and India." Broadly, the Islamists have threatened to launch further knife attacks ("sharp blades") on travelers to spread fear among visitors and hurt the tourism industry. The message suggested hitting the "vulnerable" parts of the country, i.e., the tourism sector, which is the backbone of the Maldivian economy ([Raajje.MV](https://raajje.mv), February 6). Though the message didn't claim any IS links or inspirations or use any IS insignia, it had a jihadist *nashid* (or *tarana*, meaning anthem) running at the start of the video that was previously used by IS propaganda units. [1] Nevertheless, IS has not officially claimed the knife attacks in the Maldives, yet.

Stabbing or knife attacks are prevalent in the Maldives, and knives and machetes seem to be the preferred weapon for criminal and gang entities. However, knife attacks against tourists or foreigners are rare. The recent incident was a stark reminder of the first-ever Islamist terrorist attack in the Maldives, which took place in Male in September 2007, targeting foreign nationals. A crude improvised explosive device (IED) injured nearly 12 foreigners, including tourists from the United Kingdom, Japan, and China in the capital's Sultan Park area. The attack targeted the tourism industry for its alleged un-Islamic practices and sinful influence on local culture. A massive crackdown across the country prompted extremist elements to flee the country (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), February 12, 2010).

Meanwhile, by February 13, Maldivian police claimed to have arrested seven Islamists for the early February incidents, some of whom previously engaged in spreading extremist ideologies in Madduvarri, Raa Atoll ([Edition](#), February 15). Though security agencies investigating the recent attacks have yet to divulge any details about the connection, the knife attacks could be revenge for the search and sweep operation codenamed Operation Asseyri, which was conducted on Madduvarri Island in December 2019.

Maduvarri, Radical Paradise

Operation Asseyri was conducted to check religious extremism, to investigate cases of separatism that were being conducted under the guise of Islamic practices, and to cease the exploitation of women and children. The operation also aimed to curb the spread of terrorist propaganda and recruitment drives in Maduvarri. During the weeklong crackdown, which commenced in the sparsely inhabited island on December 18, a joint force of Maldivian Army and police arrested several Islamists who had denied their family

members (women and children) education and primary health care under the garb of strict adherence to Islamic practices ([The Sun](#), December 21, 2019; [Edition](#), January 8). Close scrutiny of the recent Islamist video message reveals a cryptic mention of this operation that perhaps led to the attack: "Your presumption that after deceiving the masses you can snatch our wives and children from us and dismantle our families and then live in peace is false."

For the first time, the country's security apparatus geared up against groups of radicalized individuals in Maduvvari, which is fertile ground for terrorist recruitment and indoctrination. Many of the radical individuals who have traveled to Syria and Afghanistan have a connection with Maduvvari and its version of radical Islam. According to media reports citing security sources, radicalized individuals in the community consider the Maldives a "land of sin," and believe people who do not subscribe to their extremist views are "infidels" ([Edition](#), December 22, 2019). There were also cases related to "child brides" in Maduvvari that surfaced in November last year, which prompted the authorities to monitor the island closely ([Maldives Independent](#), November 24, 2019).

The operation in Maduvvari is not the only eye-opening case for the Maldivian government and security agencies. The lack of monitoring and surveillance on its remote inhabited islands led them to become hubs of extremism in the past. A similar situation surfaced in October 2007 following the Sultan Park bombing, when security forces unearthed a breeding ground for extremists in the illegal Dhar-ul-Khair mosque on the isolated island of Himandhoo after a violent confrontation. Subsequently, an al-Qaeda linked jihadist forum showcased the mosque standoff in its propaganda video ([Minivan News/Web Archive](#), October 9, 2007 ; [Minivan Archive](#), February 10, 2010).

IS Still has Traction

In October 2019, Maldivian security agencies arrested Mohamad Ameen, an Islamist militant recruiter associated with IS. Local media reports blamed Ameen for changing the religious profile of Maduvvari during his banishment there a decade ago ([The Sun](#), December 19, 2019). Security officials also came out publicly and raised concerns over the recent high rate of radicalization in the country. According to information shared by the country's top police official, Mohamed Hameed, there are around 1,400 radicalized individuals in the Maldives who subscribe to violent extremist ideology and, "who would not hesitate to kill in the name of Islam" ([Maldives Independent](#), December 17, 2019). Around the same time, Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) sources revealed that several radicalized individuals operating in the Maldives think of education as a "Western idea" and kept their children away from mainstream schooling. The MNDF official also revealed how Islamists are averse to vaccination drives in the country's remote islands and consider preventative healthcare "antithetical to reliance on God." In mid-January, Maldives Police initiated an investigation into ongoing anti-vaccination campaigns on social media purportedly run by Islamist groups ([The Edition](#), December 16, 2019; [Edition](#), January 15).

Officially, 173 radicalized Maldivians have traveled to Syria to fight alongside jihadist groups linked with al-Qaeda and IS, while 432 have reportedly attempted to travel to Syria ([The Edition](#), December 18, 2019). These official statistics did not mention Maldivians who traveled and joined IS' branch in Afghanistan, where a court has sentenced a Maldivian couple for charges related to terrorism. Unsurprisingly, the Maldives has earned notoriety for being one of the most significant per capita contributors of foreign jihadist fighters to Syria and Iraq. Even though there may be discrepancies in official numbers, it portrays a bleak picture of how radicalized Maldivians desire to join the ongoing jihad in Syria or Afghanistan.

A 2015 landmark report titled, "A Preliminary Assessment of Radicalisation in the Maldives," warned long before about this prevailing situation in the country. [2] The report was produced by the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)—which was dissolved following lobbying by Islamists—and warned about growing extremism in the country, the role of Salafist NGOs and the role social media plays in radicalization in the Maldives ([Maldives Times](#), October 8, 2019). The report also exposed how the extremist ideal is diluting the religious belief system of Maldivian society at large. Long after the MDN report, the government-approved Commission on Disappearances and Deaths unearthed and revealed for the first time al-Qaeda and IS networks and their crimes in the country. The present coalition government under President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih has no choice but to tackle the long-ignored extremist threat, irrespective of political pressures and religious orientations.

Notes

[1] A shorter version of the video is still accessible at the time of this writing. See, Twitter, February 05, <https://twitter.com/i/status/1225093264883122176>

[2] The Full text of the Report Titled "A Preliminary Assessment of Radicalisation in the Maldives" can be accessed at <https://www.docdroid.net/qyCy9gk/preliminary-assessment-of-radicalisation-in-the-maldives-final80856731625919353631.pdf>

CENTRAL ASIA: How to thwart religious extremism ?

HRWF (02.03.2020) - In February 2016, the EIAS published a briefing paper entitled "[Rising Extremism in Central Asia? Stability in the Heartland for a Secure Eurasia](#)", by Sebastiano Mori and Leonardo Taccetti. This paper addressed several major issues:

- Why Central Asia?
- The role of religion in Central Asia
- An overview of Central Asian Islamic groups
- Growing radicalization?
- European Pivot to Central Asia
- Conclusions and steps forward

Its section "Conclusions and steps forward" proposes a wide range of policies to thwart rising religious extremism in Central Asia.

As of 31 January 2019, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* highlighted the repressive but inefficient policies of some countries in the region by documenting in its [Database of FORB Prisoners](#) a number of cases of detention of non-violent believers exercising their right to religious freedom but accused of extremism:

Kazakhstan: 28 prisoners

1 Jehovah's Witness – 18 Sunni Muslims – 9 Tablighi Jamaat Muslims

Tajikistan: 31 prisoners

1 Protestant - 2 Jehovah's Witnesses – 2 Tablighi Jamaat Muslims – 26 Sunni Muslims

Turkmenistan: 26 prisoners

9 Said Nursi Muslims – 17 Jehovah's Witnesses

Uzbekistan: 38 prisoners

38 Sunni Muslims

Repressive policies and sentencing non-violent believers to prison terms is a non-solution to the problem of public and state security. Such measures only fuel popular resentment and provide fertile ground for further radicalization.

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<https://hrwf.eu/newsletters/security-x-religion/>

"Steps forward

This study underlines the different nature and traits of the several Islamic movements present in the Central Asian region in order to raise awareness concerning the ineffective and often backfiring "one-size-fits-all" policy adopted by the governments without regards to the diverse array of forms of Islam. A major opening concerning freedom of beliefs and freedom of thought should be incentivized, especially in Central Asia's most autocratic governments. Increasing youth opportunities and religious freedom will prevent the rise of dissatisfaction and discontent among the population and therefore drastically reduce the chances that new generations will join the extremists' ranks. A number of the groups examined, namely Gülen, *Tablighi Jama'at* and Sufists are actually moderate, fostering more tolerant behaviour than other more radical movements. Given that they do not dispense an Islamic education and instead boost the dialogue among different religious groups, FG's schools should be legal in each republic, not discriminated but encouraged in their efforts to disseminate their model of secular education without proselytism. Investing in this positive education methodology will contribute to raising youth knowledge, driving the younger generation away from potential attempts of recruitment and radicalisation and creating a peaceful and prosperous environment. "The grassroots levels are the key environments to achieve an inclusive society and to fight radicalisation" as Ms Malika Hamidi Director General of European Muslim Network of Brussels stated. (88)

Raising awareness of the importance of rediscovering the "enlightened and ethical" Islam doctrine based upon the Hanafi School and social initiatives would play a crucial role in shaping a more inclusive religious sphere (89).

We should not underestimate the importance of the imams and mufti as religious leaders in Central Asia. Enhancing their role and better training them in negotiation and mediation in conflict resolution could contribute significantly towards preventing radicalisation and terrorist attacks (90). The lack of understanding of their religion, in particular among young Muslims, should also be addressed from within their community. Increasing religious leaders' role in these matters is another step forward – already being implemented in Kyrgyzstan – in fostering more tolerance and in fighting the lack of education amongst the younger generations. In addition, "we should not forget about prisons, which are becoming a breeding ground for radicalisation. Working with convicts and establishing community-dialogues involving the imams are practices already in use in some Central Asian states such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and are bringing positive results", said Mr Keneshbek Sainazarov, Kyrgyzstan Country Director of Search for Common Ground. (91)

The difficulty of combating terrorism and violent extremism lies on the complexity of the different reasons that push people to use a more radical approach and to fight for jihadist and fundamentalist groups. The lack of understanding of the above mentioned motivations should be resolved through the direct involvement of European and Central Asian Muslims in the process of radicalism prevention.

Furthermore, a country's stability is best ensured where there is economic stability and where its citizens can take care of themselves economically and efficiently. For these reasons, and given the multifactorial and transnational nature of the radicalism challenge, Central Asian countries should use a more comprehensive approach, involving not only law enforcement and border security but also civil society, religious groups, information sharing and addressing local community-level issues, while keeping in mind the importance of economic development, youth employment and religious freedom.

In this framework where the U.S., Russia, the Council of Europe, OSCE and to some extent NATO are involved, the EU-Central Asia Strategy should do more and include in its objectives the challenges of foreign fighters and radicalisation, drug trafficking and organized crime, and conflicts that require cooperation between Central Asia and the EU. Approaching the five republics with a balanced mix of soft policies and investments in human capital and inclusive economic development, together with more realistic tools can be the right strategy to secure the Heartland. "

⁸⁸ Information obtained through interview with Ms Malika Hamidi, Director General of the European Muslim Network.

⁸⁹ Zhussipbek, *Religious Radicalism in Central Asia*.

⁹⁰ Mirsaiitov, I., Sakeeva, V. Baseline Assessment Report, In the framework of the "Strengthening capacity to prevent violent extremism in the Kyrgyz Republic" project.

⁹¹ Information obtained through interview with Mr. Keneshbek Sainazarov, Kyrgyzstan Country Director, Search for Common Ground.

FRANCE: Macron unveils curbs on foreign imams in France to combat 'separatism'

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday announced measures to end a programme that allowed foreign countries to send imams and teachers to France in a bid to crack down on what he called the risk of "separatism".

France 24 (20.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2wAbzIp> - During a visit to the eastern French city of Mulhouse, Macron said the government sought to combat "foreign interference" in how Islam is practiced and the way its religious institutions are organised.

"A problem arises when, in the name of religion, some want to separate themselves from the Republic and therefore not respect its laws," he said.

Macron plans to end a programme created in 1977 that allowed nine countries to send imams and teachers to France to provide foreign-language and culture classes that are not subject to any supervision from French authorities.

Four majority-Muslim countries – Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Turkey – were involved in the programme, which reaches about 80,000 students every year. Around 300 imams were sent to France every year by these countries and those who arrived in 2020 will be the last to arrive in such numbers, said Macron.

The government has asked the French Muslim Council (CFCM), the body representing Islam in France, to find solutions to train imams on French soil instead and ensure they can speak French and do not spread Islamist views.

The measures were part of a much-anticipated intervention less than a month before municipal elections in France. Macron's speech came at the end of a visit to Mulhouse, home to a large Muslim community that has been the focus of the French government's campaign against Islamism.

The new rules were intended to counter Islamic extremism in France by giving the government more authority over the schooling of children, the financing of mosques and the training of imams, said Macron.

"This end to the consular Islam system is extremely important to curb foreign influence and make sure everybody respects the laws of the republic," he told a news conference in Mulhouse.

'We cannot have Turkey's laws on France'

The scrapping of the programme granting countries the right to send imams and teachers to France would instead be replaced by bilateral agreements to ensure French state has control over the courses and their content starting in September.

France had agreements with a number of countries, including Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, said Macron. But the only country with which France did not reach a bilateral agreement was Turkey.

"Turkey today can make the choice to follow that path with us or not, but I won't let any foreign country feed a cultural, religious or identity-related separatism on our Republic's ground," he said.

"We cannot have Turkey's laws on France's ground. No way," Macron added.

Turkey runs a vast network of mosques inside the country and abroad under the powerful Diyanet, or Directorate of Religious Affairs. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Diyanet budget has dramatically increased amid criticism that the body was being used by Ankara as a foreign policy tool and an attempt to extend Turkey's soft power.

Home to Europe's largest Muslim community, estimated at around 6 million, or 8 percent of the population, France has long sought to assimilate its Muslim nationals and residents in a country that holds fast to laïcité, or state secularism, a 1905 legal principle that separated church and state and mandated the state's neutrality on religion.

France has suffered major attacks by Islamist militants in recent years. Coordinated bombings and shootings in November 2015 at the Bataclan theatre and other sites

around Paris killed 130 people – the deadliest attacks in France since World War Two. Most of the attackers were French or Belgian nationals who had travelled to Turkey and from there to Iraq and Syria to fight with the Islamic State (IS) group.

Fighting 'separatism' or communities governing themselves

Addressing the issue of "separatism", Macron warned of the dangers of "communitarianism" or the practice of communities governing themselves in France. He called for better integration of Muslims in wider society.

"We are here for a reason that we share with Muslims – that is the struggle against communitarianism," he said. Macron insisted the new measures were not anti-Islam, but were designed to aid the integration and provide opportunities for France's Muslims.

"What we must put in place is not, as I have sometimes heard from some people, 'a plan against Islam'. That would be a profound mistake," said Macron. "What we must fight is the separatism, because when the Republic does not keep its promises, others will try to replace it."
