

FRANCE: The proposed 'law on separatisms' should not target religion

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

The European Times (21.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3m1SGIQ> - The proposed 'law on separatisms' announced by the President of the Republic and the Minister of the Interior should not target Islam as a religion, but should instead tackle political Islam, in particular Salafism, and its organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and its satellite associations.

Consequently, the fight against radical Islamism should only be waged where it is active and solely against individuals who preach or publicly support it, including on social media.

The proposed law plans to implement Chapter V (articles 25-36) of the 9 December 1905 [Law On the Separation Between Churches and State](#) titled "Police des cultes" and intended "to protect places of worship from the spreading of ideas and statements as well as from acts hostile to the laws of the Republic." However, it's not 'mosques' that disseminate extremist ideas, but rather the individuals in leadership roles who instrumentalize religious teachings for political purposes. Certain imams and preachers, who have been identified by the authorities for a very long time, behave as political militants instead of providing faith-building to their communities. The proposed law must combat them, not the religious community they belong to. The announced news of the involvement of the police des cultes sets the fight against Islamism at the religious level when it should be carried out at the political one instead. Other religious or spiritual communities and other categories of believers have nothing to do with this political militant activism. The problem to be solved is political, not religious.

The proposed law also includes obligatory school education being introduced earlier, at the age of three, to facilitate children's socialisation and integration into French society. Although it is laudable, prohibiting home education as a strategy against Islamism does not make sense. Up until now, there has not been a case where a child who was educated at home then became an Islamist or a terrorist. In these difficult times, it is senseless to upset families of believers across all faiths, including Catholics, by measures intended to fulfil objectives that are political and not religious. In fact, many Muslim families in France have suffered from the experience of one of their children running away from home to fight in Syria. Those parents are not responsible for the decision of their minor or young adult children as they never taught them this political Islamism, but they are the victims of it.

The French government's plan is to present the proposed law to the Council of Ministers on the symbolic date of 9 December, perhaps even earlier, and then to update it in the meantime. The reason is that the timing of this legislative process coincides with the recent horrific [beheading of a teacher](#) who gave a lesson about civic education, specifically on freedom of expression, that included respectful debate about caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed.

An update of this proposed law should include revisions that centre around the main focus of its objective: the fight against a terrorist political ideology that is segregationist and discriminatory, and that fractures and fragments society with the intent of inciting violent community-based confrontations.