

Table of Contents

- ***EGYPT: Egypt begins dismissing imams based on Brotherhood ties***
- ***UZBEKISTAN: Uzbekistan repatriates women and children linked to Islamic State in Syria***
- ***FRANCE: Anti-Extremism Law: Government eliminates controversial provisions***
- ***FRANCE: State Council shares scholars' concern***
- ***FRANCE: Article 38 in new French anti-extremism draft law discriminates against foreign-based religions***
- ***FRANCE: 76 mosques face closure, 66 migrants deported***
- ***THE NETHERLANDS: FvD wants to install wiretapping equipment in Salafist mosques***
- ***FRANCE: From Afghanistan to France: Islamism attacks schools and kills teachers***
- ***FRANCE: The "Law Against Separatism" targets "cults" as well as Islam***
- ***FRANCE: French prosecutors charge seven, including two teens, over teacher's killing***
- ***FRANCE: The proposed 'law on separatisms' should not target religion***
- ***FRANCE : Le projet de loi sur les séparatismes ne doit pas s'en prendre à la religion***
- ***European Court of Human Rights (ECHR): Foreign terrorists invoke human rights to stay in Europe***
- ***PAKISTAN: Coronavirus and Islam: Pakistani clerics refuse to shut down mosques***
- ***SOUTH KOREA: Hundreds of Protestant Churches refuse to halt their religious services***
- ***INDIA: Religious freedom is not illimited - Kerala, celebrations of mass despite bans: priest arrested***
- ***ROMANIA: Religious freedom is not illimited***
- ***MALDIVES: Islamic State-inspired knife attack exposes the vulnerability of the Maldives***
- ***CENTRAL ASIA: How to thwart religious extremism ?***
- ***FRANCE: Macron unveils curbs on foreign imams in France to combat 'separatism'***

EGYPT: Egypt begins dismissing imams based on Brotherhood ties

Some legal experts are questioning the Egyptian Ministry of Religious Endowments' decision to dismiss a number of imams across Egypt over their ties to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Al-Monitor (09.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2LARf0U> - Egypt's Minister of Religious Endowments Mohamed Mokhtar Gomaa issued Dec. 1 a decision terminating the service of an imam and preacher in Port Said governorate based on a judicial ruling.

In a statement issued on the same day, the Ministry of Religious Endowments said that based on the ruling issued against Abd al-Rahman Ahmed Qandil, the imam and preacher of the Port Said Endowments, the dismissal decision included a warning to all mosques of the republic not to allow him to mount the pulpit, give lessons or lead any prayers in mosques.

A source at the ministry told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity that the ruling issued against Qandil proves his affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood group. The ruling, he said, was transferred to the Human Resources Department at the ministry, which upheld the imam's illegibility to continue practicing his job. Gomaa subsequently issued a decision to officially dismiss him, he added.

The source said this decision is not the first of its kind, as Gomaa had launched a major campaign several years ago to cleanse the ministry of the remnants of the Muslim Brotherhood and of those who follow its ideology and methodology.

He pointed out that based on judicial rulings, the Ministry of Religious Endowments dismissed Nov. 4 four imams and revoked the license of another. They include Ahmed Muhammad Jumah Salem, Muhammad Abdullah Hussein al-Jabali, Omar Hamid Tamam, Muhammad Muhammad Abd al-Sami and Abd al-Wahhab Mustafa Mustafa Khoder.

The ministry also warned in an official statement Nov. 4 that it would take decisive measures against all those who join any banned groups, adopt extremist ideology, or carry out acts of sabotage or instigation, albeit via social media.

On July 21, the Ministry of Religious Endowments announced the dismissal of two imams from the Sharqiya Endowments based on judicial rulings issued against them. It stressed that there is no room in the ministry for extremist ideology or for individuals who belong to terrorist groups.

The ministry had also announced Nov. 21, 2019, the dismissal of imams and preachers from mosques "after it was proven that they belong to the Muslim Brotherhood."

The Ministry of Religious Endowments had issued a decision to dismiss nine imams on Oct. 31, 2019, based on court rulings stating that they belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood. Six imams were suspended from work on Jan. 25, 2014, for their participation in pro-Muslim Brotherhood demonstrations.

On Nov. 16, 2019, the Supreme Administrative Court of Egypt's State Council looked into a lawsuit filed by lawyer Samir Sabry — who is well known in Egypt for being close to the authorities — calling on the state to issue decisions that would see all employees belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood dismissed from their public posts.

Sabry told Al-Monitor over the phone that he filed the lawsuit because the Muslim Brotherhood wanted to control all aspects of the Egyptian state after the January 25 Revolution and the group's rise to power, and they issued numerous decisions appointing several members of the group to many state positions.

He said he filed the lawsuit because he thought the spread of Muslim Brotherhood members in government departments would affect the performance of said government, especially considering that such members belong to a terrorist group and it is inconceivable to allow them to stay in their positions.

Sabry said the ruling of the Court for Urgent Matters, issued on Sept. 23, 2013, prohibited the "activity" of the Muslim Brotherhood, and employees belonging to the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood are to be consequently dismissed.

The government source at the Ministry of Religious Endowments told Al-Monitor that all the decisions issued by the ministry to dismiss these imams are based on court rulings against them due to their affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood. Such decisions, he said, are consistent with the law, as the Court for Urgent Matters' 2013 ruling banned any affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, being a terrorist group, and any activities related thereto.

The source said the ruling prohibited all citizens from joining this group and all institutions from being affiliated with it. He added that all decisions to terminate the service of imams affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood are legal decisions because they are based on judicial rulings.

Adel Ramadan, a human rights researcher with the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, told Al-Monitor over the phone that the Egyptian Constitution has guaranteed freedom of opinion and expression, stressing that the dismissal decisions are not aligned with the constitution.

Article 65 of the Egyptian Constitution stipulates that "freedom of thought and opinion is guaranteed. All individuals have the right to express their opinion through speech, writing, imagery or any other means of expression and publication."

Ramadan said the state has for years adopted a hostile approach as far as the Muslim Brotherhood is concerned, and it currently adopts several punitive measures to tighten the noose around the group through security prosecutions, arrest campaigns, seizure and confiscation of funds, hazing of members within the government apparatus and dismissal of a large number of group members from various government positions.

He pointed out that the Ministry of Religious Endowments' decision to dismiss a large number of imams violate the law because they are based on a ruling issued by the Court for Urgent Matters and not based on the provisions of the State Council, which is competent in this regard.

Ramadan said the Court for Urgent Matters has turned into a political tool in the hands of the state, adding that the court has been repeatedly used for political purposes and to issue rulings in favor of the state, most notably on Dec. 31, 2016, when it issued a ruling to hand over the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia.

He said the state chose Gomaa as minister because he is known for his open hostility toward the Muslim Brotherhood, as evidenced by his media statements about the

importance of confronting the group. Gomaa had repeatedly said that the state must forcefully confront the group's members because they are like corrupt members that need to be eradicated in order for the state to survive. This explains Gomaa's role in issuing many decisions dismissing imams belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, Ramadan concluded.

UZBEKISTAN: Uzbekistan repatriates women and children linked to Islamic State in Syria

The 98 people were in camps for Islamic State fighters and their families in Kurdish-run northeast Syria. Some other countries have also brought their citizens home from IS camps there, while others have refused.

Al-Monitor (08.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3oRGLZq> - Uzbekistan has repatriated 98 people from families from camps in Syria for Islamic State (IS) affiliates.

The Central Asian country brought 25 women and 73 children home, Reuters reported Tuesday. They were in the al-Hol and Roj camps living in horrid conditions, according to the outlet.

The autonomous administration of north and east Syria runs several detention centers for IS fighters, affiliates and their families throughout the territory the Kurdish-led administration controls. Uzbeks are among those who traveled to Syria to join IS from 2014.

The autonomous administration has repeatedly asked foreign governments to take back their citizens from the area, but their efforts have achieved mixed results. France repatriated 10 children from the notorious al-Hol camp for IS-affiliated families in June. The same month, a Dutch court ruled that the Netherlands does not need to take back women and children of IS fighters from the European country.

Turkey also helped a Moldovan family get out of al-Hol in July in what Kurdish authorities told Al-Monitor constituted a "smuggling" operation. In October, the administration announced the release of Syrians from al-Hol.

The Uzbek citizens will go to a medical facility and then receive help finding employment and places to live. Uzbekistan also repatriated 220 women and children in 2019, according to Reuters.

Some IS-affiliated returnees have been prosecuted elsewhere in the world. In Italy, a woman who joined IS and was later repatriated from Syria was charged with terrorism in September.

FRANCE: Anti-Extremism Law: Government eliminates controversial provisions

Following the advice of the State Council, the new text no longer includes parts that would have put religious liberty at risk.

by Massimo Introvigne



Council of Ministers (source: French Presidency of the Republic)

Bitter Winter Int'l (09.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/340YPYO> - On December 9, the French Council of Ministers passed an amended text of the anti-extremism law, which accepts the objections and comments of the State Council. The latter reflected the prevailing opinion about both French and international scholars of religion, as presented inter alia in a White Paper of which I was a co-author and in articles published by *Bitter Winter*.

The most dangerous provisions from the point of view of religious liberty that were included in the original text of the draft law have now disappeared.

First, the total ban of homeschooling is no longer part of the law. According to the new Article 21, homeschooling may be authorized on a yearly basis by the school authorities, for reasons including "the special situation of the child, provided that the persons responsible for his or her education justify their ability to offer an instruction in the family respecting the prevailing interest of the child." "Religious and philosophical persuasions" are not enough to request that children be homeschooled, but the notion of "special situation" may indeed allow for a liberal grant of the authorizations.

Second, places of worship can no longer be shut down by administrative authorities for sermons or distribution of literature promoting "discrimination," a vague concept that would have put, for example, the expression of views on abortion and homosexuality traditional in certain religions at risk. Only "incitation to violence and hate" remains as ground for shutting down a place of worship in the new Article 44.

Third, the new Article 35 authorizes the local "prefect" to prevent a religious entity from receiving funding or other help from abroad only in presence of "a threat that is real,

current, and serious enough to affect a fundamental social interest." The comments of the State Council on this delicate issue, and European Union case law, have been taken into account, even if there is still the risk that overzealous "prefects" may adopt an excessively broad interpretation of the "serious and current threats" and "fundamental social interests."

Fourth, and most importantly, it would not be possible to liquidate by administrative fiat a religious organization because it exerts "psychological pressures" on members, or incites or commits "acts against human dignity." As we observed in our own criticism of the law, which was shared by the State Council, "human dignity" is a concept that may be subject to different interpretations. For instance, the so-called "ostracism," i.e. the fact that some religious organizations counsel their devotees not to associate with "apostate" ex-members turned into opponents of their former religion, is constructed by some as being "against human dignity," notwithstanding the fact that in various countries courts of law have declared it part of the freedom of religious bodies to organize themselves as they deem fit.

The notion of "psychological pressures" is reminiscent of the scientifically discredited theory of "brainwashing," allegedly used by "cults." As the State Council observed, these provisions in the old text of the law may have been aimed at introducing a tool for the swift administrative liquidation of groups labelled as "cults" (*sectes*), without passing through the final decision of a court of law. But this would have put religious liberty at risk.

In the new Article 8, these reasons allowing the dissolution or liquidation of a religious association are no longer mentioned.

The law should now move to the Parliament, where it can be further amended. It seems difficult that the Parliament can ignore the clear remarks of the State Council, and the questions of constitutionality it raised. On the other hand, an anti-cult lobby is highly active in France and may try to include again provisions aimed at restricting the religious freedom of the groups it condemns as "cults." *Bitter Winter* is proud to have participated in this important discussion, and will continue to monitor the progress of the draft law.

FRANCE: State Council shares scholars' concern

Administrative liquidation, harassment of groups labeled as "cults," total ban on home-schooling are deemed as being against the French Constitution

by Massimo Introvigne



The Palais Royal in Paris, home of the State Council (credits)

Bitter Winter Int'l (08.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2ItkeTb> - French Council of Ministers will examine on December 8 the controversial draft law against "religious extremism." I am among the authors of a **White Paper** arguing that, while some provisions of the draft law make sense in a country plagued by terrorism using ultra-fundamentalist Islam as its ideology, several provisions are dangerous for religious liberty. *Bitter Winter* also **called the attention** on the religious freedom problems of the text.

The Conseil d'État, the French State Council, is the highest legal advisory body in France. Draft laws are submitted to its exam. The Council's opinions are not binding, but a law passed ignoring them is exposed to the serious risk of being declared unconstitutional.

Bitter Winter has seen a copy of the 67-page opinion of the Council of State. It raises several technical and constitutional objections against several articles of the draft law, while supporting other articles. The opinion insists on a general principle, that religious leaders and believers cannot claim a "religious exemption" when they breach common laws, yet they cannot be submitted to obligations not imposed on other citizens. This principle is applied, inter alia, to freedom of expression and opinions expressed in sermons in places of worship and in religious literature. They cannot include hate speech or other contents generally forbidden in France, but the law cannot impose on preachers and publishers of religious brochures obligations heavier than those applied to all French citizens.

On the four points raised in the White Paper and by *Bitter Winter*, the State Council intervenes with specific advice, confirming that the objections raised by scholars of religion are well-founded and have been heard.

First, the draft law included what amounted to a general ban of homeschooling, with minimal exceptions. While not judging the whole part of the draft law as unconstitutional, the State Council raised “serious objections,” and recommended to list a number of cases in which homeschooling will remain permissible, based on an authorization by the school authorities to be granted on a yearly basis. While the family’s religious belief per se is not among the reasons generally allowing homeschooling, the Council specifies that its reference to the best interest of the student should allow for “quality educational project” of homeschooling to continue.

Second, we objected on the provision allowing the administrative authorities to shut down places of worship where sermons and activities promote “discrimination,” and not only “terrorism” or “violence”. The State Council recommends, as we did, that “the reference to the promotion of ‘discrimination’ in the draft law as ground to shut down a place of worship should be eliminated. The definition is too uncertain, and the risk is to unduly broaden the scope of the provision,” thus violating the Constitutional and international principle of religious liberty.

Third, we regarded as the single most dangerous provision of the draft law the introduction of a swift administrative liquidation of religious organizations, not only when they promote terrorism or violence, but also when they exert “psychological pressures” on members, or incite or commit “acts against human dignity.” Just as we observed in *Bitter Winter* and in the White Paper, the State Council notes that “the principle of human dignity has a moral dimension that may be the object of conflicting interpretations” (we mentioned the examples of religiously based opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage, but many others come to mind), and that “considering the serious risk of violating the principle of freedom of association, the State Council suggests to exclude the ‘acts against human dignity’ from the reasons allowing the legal dissolution of an association.”

Similarly, the State Council recommends eliminating the reference to “psychological pressures” as too vague and in turn dangerous for religious liberty. The State Council understands perfectly that this provision in the draft law may “target the cults (*sectes*) and similar movements,” but notes that France has a legislation against “cults” allowing the dissolution of their associations—not through an administrative order, however, but after a “final conviction in a court of law in a criminal case.”

Fourth, we criticized Article 38 of the draft law, and the possibility for the administrative authorities to prevent French religious entities from receiving financial support from abroad in case of a serious threat to a “fundamental social interest.” The State Council believes that the provision is not unconstitutional, but only if the “fundamental social interest” is defined as a “threat real, current, and very serious” to the social order. This is a step ahead, but too much will still be left to the appreciation of the administrative authorities. Today we published [an article by Alessandro Amicarelli](#) on this subject, which would hopefully shed more light on the problems of Article 38.

The State Council’s comments appear to be inspired but by commons sense and by an awareness of the domestic and international criticism of provisions dangerous for religious liberty. We may only hope the Council of Ministers will follow them.

FRANCE: Article 38 in new French anti-extremism draft law discriminates against foreign-based religions

A provision allegedly introduced to cut foreign funding to Islamic radical groups may in fact severely limit the activities of hundreds of different religious movements

by Alessandro Amicarelli



The Palais de Bourbon in Paris, the seat of the lower house of the French Parliament (credits).

Bitter Winter has covered the new French draft law on extremism, explaining why, as it previously happened in Russia, measures intended to contain Islamic radicalism and terrorism create dangers for freedom of religion or belief in general.

One provision of the draft law that was overlooked by many, and which is no less dangerous than others, is Article 38. Ostensibly, its purpose is to limit the activities of Islamic radical organizations that are funded by citizens or foundations based in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Emirates, or Turkey. However, as is the case for the law in general, provisions targeting one specific religion would be unconstitutional and non-compliant with other basic legal principles. To avoid this risk, these provisions are formulated in general terms. But precisely these general terms endanger hundreds of peaceful and law-abiding organizations (also including the peaceful organizations that constitute the vast majority of the Islamic groups).

According to Article 38, any cash contribution, benefit, or resource granted to a French religious association by a foreign State, legal entity, or individual, whose amount or value exceeds Euro 10,000 should be declared to the French administrative authorities. Note that this does not apply to monetary contributions only, but to benefits whose value should be assessed on a case by case basis. For instance, a foreign person or entity may assist a French religious association with services whose value may be assessed at more

than Euro 10,000. This may also be the case when the foreign entity supports (with more than Euro 10,000 per year) missionaries or other personnel helping a French branch.

What happens after the foreign contribution has been declared? The administrative authority may believe that the contribution is contrary to a “fundamental social interest.” The French religious association will be heard, but the final decision will be rendered at the administrative level by the “prefect,” who operates under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. If the prefect still believes the contribution threatens a “fundamental social interest,” he or she will issue an order compelling the French religious association to give back the foreign contribution within three months. The failure to return the contribution will become a crime punished with a jail penalty of two years, plus a fine of Euro 30,000. The foreign contribution will be confiscated.

Why is the provision dangerous? The average French citizen may only have in mind the wealthy “Saudi Islamic fundamentalists” ready to finance potential terrorists in France. But, while such individuals may have sophisticated systems to elude the law, Article 38 would threaten the very existence of hundreds of peaceful Islamic communities, Evangelical churches, new religious movements, and other religious entities that depend for their support from parent organizations or churches abroad.

Imagine an Evangelical church in France that is a newly created branch of an American or Brazilian or South Korean missionary body (today, many large Evangelical churches have their headquarters in Asia, Africa, or Latin America rather than in the United States). Being new, it would have a small number of French members, and would depend on the help through money contributions, personnel, and other resources of its parent church abroad.

Under Article 38, these contributions should be declared to the “prefect,” who can forbid them as contrary to a “fundamental social interest.” Somebody can believe that a “prefect” would only act if the resources are clearly intended to support terrorism or political extremism. But this is not the case. France officially opposes groups it labels as “cults” (*sectes*) and officially cooperates, **as confirmed by the Minister Delegate in Charge of Citizenship, Marlène Schiappa**, when discussing the law, with UNADFI, a French anti-cult organizations that is part of FECRIS, the European Federation of Research and Information Centers on Sectarianism. FECRIS, which receives financial support from the French government, was recently **exposed by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** as a serious international threat to religious liberty.

FECRIS and France have a very liberal notion of “cult” (*secte*), and have listed hundreds of groups as such. Given the cooperation between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FECRIS affiliate in France, a “prefect” could easily rely on the proscription lists compiled by UNADFI or FECRIS to identify certain groups as “cults,” and conclude that “cults” threaten “fundamental social interests.” FECRIS has an international character and networks, and it may be enough for a movement to be proscribed as a “cult” in Russia or China to be also regarded as “against fundamental social interests” in France. Even outside the area of movements labeled as “cults,” xenophobia (also in the form of Islamophobia) or media campaigns may always play a role.

Article 38 creates a regime of discrimination against religions whose headquarters are not in France, violating several principles of international law. No exception is granted even for contributions coming from within the European Union. This is another egregious

example of how statutes introduced as tools to contain radical Islam may and will be easily used against all sort of religious minorities—and a dangerous Trojan horse needing attention internationally.

FRANCE: 76 mosques face closure, 66 migrants deported

As part of gov't crackdown on 'separatism', mosques to be inspected as dozens suspected of 'radicalisation' deported. France is home to the largest Muslim minority population in Europe and some fear being collectively punished after a series of attacks in recent months

Al Jazeera (03.12.2020) - The French government launched a "massive and unprecedented" wave of measures to combat what it calls religious "extremism", targeting 76 mosques suspected of "separatism".

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin on Thursday tweeted his interview with RTL radio, writing: "In the coming days, checks will be carried out on these places of worship. If ever these doubts are confirmed, I will ask for their closure."

He also said 66 undocumented migrants suspected of "radicalisation" had been deported. President Emmanuel Macron's government has responded to several deadly attacks in recent weeks with a promise to crack down on what Darmanin has said is "the enemy within".

Darmanin said 76 mosques out of the more than 2,600 Muslim places of worship had been flagged as possible threats to France's Republican values and its security.

"There are in some concentrated areas places of worship which are clearly anti-Republican [where] imams are followed by the intelligence services and where the discourse runs counter to our values," he said.

The inspections to be carried out are part of a response to two gruesome attacks that particularly shocked France – the beheading of a teacher who showed his pupils cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed and the stabbing to death of three people in a church in Nice.

Darmanin did not reveal which places of worship would be inspected. In a note he sent to regional security chiefs, seen by AFP news agency, he listed 16 addresses in the Paris region and 60 others around the country.

The minister said the fact only a fraction of the 2,600 Muslim places of worship in France were suspected of peddling radical theories showed "we are far from a situation of widespread radicalisation".

"Nearly all Muslims in France respect the laws of the Republic and are hurt by that," he said.

Muslim minority

In October, Macron laid out a plan to tackle what he termed "Islamist separatism", as he described Islam as a religion in crisis across the world – comments that upset Muslims in France and globally.

France is home to the largest Muslim minority population in Europe, and some fear being collectively punished after a series of attacks in recent months.

On October 20, [France ordered the temporary](#) closure of a mosque outside Paris as part of a crackdown on people who are suspected of inciting hatred, after the killing of teacher Samuel Paty, who had shown his class caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Grand Mosque of Pantin, in a low-income suburb on the capital's northeastern outskirts, had shared a video on its Facebook page before the attack that vented hatred against Paty, who was beheaded in broad daylight near his school.

France has also closed two organisations – the Muslim charity BarakaCity and a civil rights group which monitors hate crimes – the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF); both have refuted the government's accusations that they harboured "radical" links.

The government's crackdown has left some Muslims feeling increasingly alienated in their own country. Some Muslim leaders while backing the government's fight against "extremism" have warned it against inadvertently lumping an overwhelming majority of their faith with the "fomenters of hate".

THE NETHERLANDS: FvD wants to install wiretapping equipment in Salafist mosques

NL Times (15.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Kw683U> - Forum for Democracy, a conservative political party, wants to install wiretapping equipment in Salafist mosques if there is a suspicion of criminal offenses. That is what FvD Member of Parliament, Theo Hiddema, said in the television program WNL on Sunday.

He argues that there are "a lot of coercive measures" in criminal law to deal with criminal organizations, which he says Salafist schools and mosques are. "They are sowing hatred and division against unbelievers and apostates, and that is a crime."

According to the FvD, insufficient work has been done to detect Salafism in the Netherlands. "There are hundreds of hate schools. You can bet that things are not right there. It has never been said to an imam: now it's enough, you sow hatred, and then we close our doors. If you say that, all hell breaks loose," proclaims Hiddema.

The former head of the Supreme Court, Geert Corstens, who was also present during the WNL broadcast, emphasized that evidence would be needed before implementing any measures. He also advocates silencing these organizations through civil law processes.

A report released by the National Coordination for counter-terrorism found that there are various factions of Salafism present in the Netherlands: the apolitical faction, the political faction, and the jihadist (violent) faction.

According to the former boss of the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), Dick Schoof, Salafism does not pose an acute threat to Dutch society. In the long term, however, the ideas could spread in the Netherlands.

FRANCE: From Afghanistan to France: Islamism attacks schools and kills teachers



By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

The European Times (26.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/34rXBqn> - On 17 October, a teacher at a middle school in a town northwest of Paris was beheaded on the street outside of his school. He was assassinated for facilitating a discussion with his students about caricatures of Islam's Prophet Muhammad during his civic education class, which is in conformity with the National Education curriculum. Police shot his killer to death sometime later that same day. French President Emmanuel Macron denounced the killing an "Islamist terrorist attack", as it appears that the killer was carrying out a sort of fatwa launched against this teacher on social media.

On Saturday 24 October, a suicide bomber attacked the Kawsar-e Danish centre in Kabul. The death toll was estimated at 24 and the number of wounded at 54, According to officials, many of the victims were teenage students between 15 and 26 years old.

In 2019, [UNICEF](#) declared that "attacks on schools in Afghanistan tripled between 2017 and 2018, surging from 68 to 192". The UN agency added that "an estimated 3.7 million children between the ages of 7 and 17 – nearly half of all school-aged children in the country – are out of school in Afghanistan", with 60% of them being girls. [Schools](#) and girls' education are clearly priority targets on the agenda of Islamist terrorists.

Teachers are increasingly vulnerable to death, injuries and abduction, not only in Afghanistan but also in other Muslim majority countries torn by conflicts with Islamist extremist groups.

Afghanistan, France and others: different countries, same battle

School education is targeted, including in democratic countries, by extremist Islamist ideology regardless of whether it is done in non-violent or violent ways.

Their objective in democracies is to intimidate teachers so that they self-censure and keep silent about numerous points of their political ideology and governance, including: extra-judicial killing, homophobia, gender-based segregation and discrimination, an inferior status of women and non-Muslim people, discrimination, and so on.

Their objective concerning educational programmes is to obstruct their implementation on a number of issues such as: teaching about the holocaust and anti-Semitism, the theory of evolution, the study of the human body, swimming lessons, and the like.

Their objective is to reach Muslim school children with their extremist Islamist teachings through various channels and mould them into active opponents to points of the curriculum that they disagree with.

Finally, the 'ideologisation' and takeover by the Muslim Brotherhood of associations addressing anti-Muslim sentiments and hate speech in democratic countries is an essential component of this strategy.

Islamism is a political ideology, not a new Muslim movement

Islamism is a political ideology and must be treated as such. Radical Islamists are not teaching an alternative theology, like the Tabligh Jamaat followers or the Sufis. They aspire to take power in Muslim-majority countries where populations are peacefully practicing and teaching Sunni, Shia and other forms of Islam. In other countries, they try to undermine and manipulate their political, educational and cultural institutions, their societal weaknesses, vulnerable groups within their societies and their generous freedoms. Their objective is to divide and fracture societies with the intent of inciting community-based violence. Chaos is the fertile ground on which they can prosper.

The battle against Islamism in France and other democratic countries must not be against Islam as a religion or against Muslims as their co-religionists in Muslim majority countries are the main victims of this ideology. An increasing number of Muslim leaders and institutions oppose Islamism in France individually and collectively, such as the Conference of the Imams in France and the Union of the Mosques in France. The French state must provide them with full assistance and must combat Islamism as a political movement on every battlefield with the appropriate weapons and partners.

FRANCE: The “Law Against Separatism” targets “cults” as well as Islam



Minister of Citizenship, Marlène Schiappa

By Massimo Introvigne

The European Times (15.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3mijyhv> - Anti-cultism is back in France. Media around the world have covered President Macron’s announcement of a new law against “separatism,” explaining it as a measure against radical Islam. It is surely true that Islam is targeted but, not for the first time, a law introduced to fight Islamic radical groups is then used against other religious movements. The Russian law against extremism is an obvious example.

The “general concept” of the law has been unveiled by the French Minister of Internal Affairs, Gérald Darmanin, on Twitter, as it is now increasingly common on world politics. We publish the document tweeted by Darmanin, to make it more easily accessible.

The draft announces the “end of home schooling” in general, “except in cases justified by medical conditions.” Obviously, this provision will target a number of Christian communities and not the Muslims only.

The draft also explains that places of worship will be put under increasing surveillance and “preserved [...] from the diffusion of ideas and statements hostile to the laws of the Republic.” Again, the law cannot target Muslims only for obvious constitutional reasons. What about a priest or pastor criticizing abortion or same-sex marriage, which are part of the laws of the French Republic, but also claiming that certain “laws of the Republic” penalize the poor and the immigrants?

Hidden in a law ostensibly aimed at Islamic radicalization is a provision that allows religious and other associations to be dissolved (the Russian word “liquidated” is not used, but the substance is very much the same) in case of “attacks on personal dignity” and “use of psychological or physical pressures.”

When reading this, and considering the French anti-cult tradition, I immediately suspected that the provision will be used against groups labeled as “cults,” and “psychological pressures” is reminiscent of the old idea of “brainwashing.” In Darmanin’s tweet the Minister of Citizenship, Marlène Schiappa, was copied.

On October 10, Schiappa gave an interview to Le Parisien confirming that “we will use the same measures against the cults and against radical Islam.” Last year, the official French anti-cult mission MIVILUDES was moved from being an independent structure under the Prime Minister to becoming a part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ anti-radicalization system. Anti-cultists protested that this may lead to the demise of the MIVILUDES, but Schiappa now explains that with the new law it will be reinforced and move from mere “analysis” to a more active role. The former politician and anti-cult activist Georges Fenech and the president of the largest French anti-cult organization, UNADFI, Joséphine Lindgren-Cesbron, will become members of the MIVILUDES. Anti-cult propaganda will be further promoted. Among the main aims indicated by Schiappa is identifying the “cults” that could be legally dissolved and banned because of “attacks on personal dignity” and “use of psychological or physical pressures.”

Much in the new draft law is constitutionally problematic, not to mention possible interventions of the European Court of Human Rights. These developments confirm, however, that anti-cultism is alive and well in France and that, as in happened in other countries, what is introduced as “a law against radical Islam” may end up targeting a wide variety of religious organizations.

Source: <https://www.cesnur.org/2020/law-against-separatism-in-france.htm>

FRANCE: French prosecutors charge seven, including two teens, over teacher’s killing

France24 (22.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2TntIks> - Two teenagers accused of pointing out French teacher Samuel Paty to his killer who beheaded him were on Wednesday charged with complicity in terrorist murder, prosecutors said, as the nation paid homage to the slain educator.

“We will not give up cartoons,” President [Emmanuel Macron](#) earlier [told a solemn ceremony at the Sorbonne university](#) in Paris attended by Paty’s family, who was targeted for having shown cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed in a civics class discussion on free speech early this month.

The president gave France's highest civilian award, the Legion of Honour, to [Paty](#) and said he had been slain by "cowards" for representing the secular, democratic values of the French Republic.

"He was killed because Islamists want our future," Macron said. "They will never have it."

Earlier Wednesday anti-terror prosecutor Jean-Francois Ricard said the two teenagers – aged 14 and 15 – had been in a group of pupils who [shared 300-350 euros \(\\$356-\\$414\) offered by the killer](#) to help find Paty.

The two stayed with the killer, Chechnya-born 18-year-old Abdullakh Anzorov, for more than two hours waiting for Paty even after he told them he wanted to "humiliate and strike" him over the Mohamed caricatures, seen as offensive by many Muslims, Ricard said.

Anzorov then killed Paty as he made his way home on foot from the junior high school where he taught in the suburb of Conflans-Sainte-Honorine outside Paris.

The pair are among seven people authorities have charged over the killing.

The parent of one of Paty's pupils, who started the social media campaign against the teacher even though his daughter was not in class when the cartoons were shown, was also charged with the same offence as the two teenagers, the national anti-terrorist prosecutor's office said late on Wednesday.

Also charged was a known Islamist radical who helped the father in his campaign.

Paty, 47, became the target of an online hate campaign over his choice of lesson material – the same images which unleashed a bloody assault by Islamist gunmen on the offices of satirical magazine [Charlie Hebdo](#) in January 2015.

A trial opened in Paris last month for complicity in that attack, which claimed the lives of 12 people including cartoonists.

'Fatwa'

Anzorov decapitated Paty with a long knife and tweeted an image of the teacher's severed head on Twitter before he was shot dead by police. Many of Paty's pupils saw the disturbing image online.

The father of the pupil had exchanged messages with Anzorov via WhatsApp in the days leading up to the murder.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has accused the father and the Islamist radical of having issued a "fatwa" against Paty.

The other three facing prosecution are friends of Anzorov, one of whom allegedly drove him to the scene of the crime while another accompanied him to purchase a weapon.

Two of them also face a complicity in terrorist murder charge while the third was charged with a lesser offence, the anti-terrorist prosecutor's office said.

Police have carried out [dozens of raids](#) since the crime, while the government has ordered the six-month closure of a mosque outside Paris and dissolved the Sheikh Yassin Collective, a group they said supported [Hamas](#).

The Palestinian militant group said on Wednesday it had "no links" with the French organisation founded by Abdelhakim Sefrioui – the Islamist radical in custody over Paty's murder.

The French government has earmarked for dissolution more than 50 other organisations it accuses of having links to radical Islam.

"Our fellow citizens expect actions," Macron said on Tuesday, promising that the government will intensify a crackdown on radical Islam.

French solidarity

Paty's beheading was the [second knife attack](#) in the name of avenging the Prophet Mohammed [since the Charlie Hebdo trial started](#) last month.

The killing has prompted an outpouring of emotion and solidarity in France, with [tens of thousands taking part in rallies](#) countrywide over the weekend.

Thousands more took part in a silent march in the teacher's honour in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine on Tuesday.

France's sports ministry said on Wednesday that participants in all professional sporting events this weekend – football, basketball, handball, rugby and ice hockey and volleyball – would observe a pre-match minute of silence for Paty, and wear black armbands for matches scheduled for next week.

(AFP)

See some media coverage of the killing of the French teacher (16-22 October) on our website

22 October

<https://www.france24.com/en/france/20201022-french-prosecutors-charge-seven-including-two-teens-over-teacher-samuel-paty-s-killing>

21 October

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20201021-france-to-pay-respects-to-beheaded-teacher-with-ceremony-at-sorbonne>

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20201021-france-to-pay-respects-to-beheaded-teacher-with-ceremony-at-sorbonne>

<https://www.france24.com/en/france/20201021-seven-people-brought-before-a-judge-over-beheading-of-french-teacher-samuel-paty>

<https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/perspective/20201021-teaching-in-france-i-feel-like-i-m-on-the-frontline-of-making-kids-better>

<https://www.dw.com/en/france-awards-legion-of-honor-to-slain-schoolteacher/a-55347030>

20 October

<https://www.france24.com/en/france/20201020-french-teacher-s-killer-sent-message-to-parent-angry-over-prophet-mohammad-cartoons>

<https://www.dw.com/en/france-shutters-mosque-in-paris-after-teachers-beheading/a-55333771>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/10/20/france-macron-samuel-paty-teacher-attack-islam-reform/>

19 October

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20201019-additional-police-operations-under-way-over-beheading-of-french-teacher>

<https://www.dw.com/en/france-police-operations-underway-after-teachers-beheading/a-55320808>

18 October

<https://www.dw.com/en/france-holds-defiant-rallies-after-murder-of-teacher/a-55314932>

<https://www.voanews.com/europe/latest-terror-attack-france-sparks-anger-fear>

17 October

<https://www.dw.com/en/french-knife-attack-suspect-identified-as-chechen-teen/a-55310643>

16 October

<https://www.kusi.com/french-leader-decries-islamist-terror-attack-against-teacher/>
<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-10-16/france-teacher-decapitated-suspect-shot-dead-by-police>

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.

FRANCE : Le projet de loi sur les séparatismes ne doit pas s'en prendre à la religion

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (21.10.2020) - Le projet de loi sur les séparatismes annoncée par le président de la République et le ministre de l'Intérieur ne devrait pas s'en prendre à la religion musulmane mais devrait s'attaquer à l'Islam politique, en particulier le salafisme, et à ses organisations, telles les Frères Musulmans et leurs associations satellites.

En conséquence, la lutte contre l'islamisme ne devrait se dérouler que là où il s'exerce, contre les personnes qui le prêchent ou qui le soutiennent publiquement, y compris sur les réseaux sociaux.

Le projet de loi prévoit d'appliquer le Titre V (articles 25-36) de la [Loi du 9 décembre 1905 sur la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat](#) intitulé Police des cultes « pour préserver les lieux de culte d'agissement et de diffusion d'idées et de propos hostiles aux lois de la République ». Or, ce ne sont pas 'les mosquées' qui véhiculent des idées extrémistes mais ce sont les hommes qui les dirigent et manipulent l'enseignement religieux à des fins politiques. Ce sont certains imams et prédicateurs bien identifiés depuis très longtemps qui, au lieu de faire de l'édification religieuse, se conduisent en militants politiques. Ce sont eux que le projet de loi doit combattre. Le recours annoncé à la police des cultes place le combat sur le champ religieux alors qu'il doit s'exercer sur le plan politique. Les autres communautés religieuses ou spirituelles et autres catégories de croyants n'ont rien à voir avec ce militantisme politique. Le problème à résoudre est politique et pas religieux.

Le projet de loi prévoit également que l'éducation scolaire obligatoire soit avancée à l'âge de trois ans pour faciliter la socialisation et l'intégration dans la société française. Bien que cela soit louable, interdire l'éducation à domicile n'a aucun sens. Jusqu'à présent, il n'est pas apparu qu'un enfant éduqué à domicile soit devenu un islamiste ou un terroriste. Dans ces temps difficiles, il est inutile d'irriter inutilement des familles croyantes de toutes confessions, y compris catholiques, par des moyens inefficaces pour atteindre des objectifs qui sont politiques et non religieux. Bien des familles musulmanes ont été frappées en France par la désertion d'un de leurs enfants vers la Syrie. Ces parents ne sont pas responsables de la décision de leur enfant, mineur ou adulte, qu'ils n'ont jamais éduqué dans cet islamisme politique mais elles en sont les victimes.

Le gouvernement a prévu de présenter le projet de loi en conseil des ministres à la date symbolique du 9 décembre, voire même plus tôt et à la suite d'une remise à jour, suite à la [décapitation sur la voie publique d'un professeur](#) ayant fait une leçon d'éducation civique sur la liberté d'expression comprenant un débat respectueux à partir des caricatures de Mahomet.

Dans le cadre d'une mise à jour de ce projet de loi, il serait bon de revoir son intitulé et de resserrer son titre sur l'essentiel de son objectif : la lutte contre une idéologie politique mortifère, ségrégationniste, discriminatoire, fracturant et fragmentant la société pour déboucher sur des confrontations communautaristes violentes.

European Court of Human Rights (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 Korea JoongAng Daily

Korea JoongAng 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/>

Monitorulcj.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](#), 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.

Maduvvari, 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 Maduvvari. 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 maybe 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.

Visit our Database of news on Security & Religion and subscribe to our newsletter: <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."

