

Table of Contents

- ***New survey sheds light on deep-rooted antisemitic attitudes across EU nations***
 - ***Catholic bishops' commission laments EU religious freedom envoy vacancy***
 - ***EU can do more to promote religious freedom***
 - ***The anti-cult ideology and FECRIS: Dangers for religious freedom. A White Paper***
 - ***FECRIS et ses associations membres: la diffamation est dans leur ADN***
 - ***FECRIS and affiliates: Defamation is in their DNA***
 - ***FECRIS denounced at the United Nations' Human Rights Council***
 - ***Europe will not have a Religious Liberty Day***
 - ***Bishops want EU's religious freedom office beefed up***
 - ***"To stop islamic terrorism, discriminate against Non-Muslim religious movements"***
 - ***Islamic religious education in Europe: an increasing matter of concern***
 - ***About the appointment of the new EU Special Envoy on freedom of religion or belief***
 - ***The EU and freedom of religion or belief at the 46th session of the Human Rights Council***
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New survey sheds light on deep-rooted antisemitic attitudes across EU nations

By Ben Cohen

The Algemeiner (12.10.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3By01BQ> - Antisemitic prejudice towards Jews persists among more than 30 percent of the population in countries across Eastern Europe, while in Western Europe, hostile views of the State of Israel command similar levels of agreement despite a sharp decline in traditional antisemitic attitudes, a new survey disclosed on Tuesday.

The survey was released by the Brussels-based European Jewish Association (EJA) at a conference on Tuesday addressed by senior Jewish and Israeli leaders. Based on polling among 1,000 respondents in each of sixteen EU member states, the survey demonstrated that antisemitism was still "deeply ingrained in Europe and hard to treat," the EJA's president, Rabbi Menachem Margolin, said.

The polling was conducted in Dec. 2019 and Jan. 2020 — three months before European countries went into lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which itself gave rise to a new wave of antisemitic conspiracy theories.

When asked questions related to what [the survey](#) described as "primary antisemitism" — that Jewish communities are an undesirable presence, that Jews engage in shady

financial practices, that a “secret Jewish network influences political and economic affairs in the world” along with similar tropes — more than a third of survey respondents in some nations of Eastern Europe manifested these attitudes.

In both Poland and Hungary, 42 percent of respondents agreed with statements based on classic antisemitic canards, with just under half agreeing “strongly.” Asked whether Jews should leave the country, 24 percent of Polish respondents agreed, while 31 percent confessed that they would be unhappy if one of the neighbors was Jewish. In Hungary, 30 percent of respondents disagreed that Europe should make all efforts to “preserve Jewish religion and culture,” 33 percent agreed that the interests of Jews differ from the general population, and 20 percent believed “it would be best if the Jews left this country.”

About 10,000 Jews currently live in Poland, a country which had a pre-World War II Jewish population of 3 million. The size of the community in Hungary is estimated at between 75,000 and 100,000. Prior to the war, more than 800,000 Jews lived in Hungary.

In Romania, the proportion of respondents agreeing with statements of “primary antisemitism” in the survey was 38 percent and in the Czech Republic 36 percent.

Levels of “primary antisemitism” were significantly lower in most of the countries that remained outside the Soviet bloc after 1945, with the exceptions of Austria, where 31 percent of respondents were in agreement, and Greece, where an astonishing 48 percent of respondents agreed with classic antisemitic tropes.

When asked whether a secret Jewish network ran the world, 58 percent of Greek respondents answered in the affirmative. Around 6,000 Jews remain in Greece today, from a community that numbered almost 80,000 before World War II.

In those countries where antisemitic incidents remain at worryingly high levels, “primary antisemitism” nonetheless remains a relatively marginal phenomenon. In France, where nearly 700 antisemitic incidents were reported in 2020, 15 percent of respondents agreed with expressions of classical antisemitism, in Germany, where there were more than 2,000 antisemitic incidents recorded 17 percent, and in the UK, with nearly 2,000 incidents last year, just six percent. The number was even in lower in the Netherlands, where only three percent of respondents exhibited hardline antisemitic attitudes.

When asked about the minimization, relativization and abuse of the Nazi Holocaust — defined by the survey as “secondary antisemitism” — antisemitic attitudes increased, according to the survey. In Poland, where government legislation recently [closed off the possibility of restitution](#) for Holocaust survivors, a full 71 percent of respondents demonstrated antisemitic understandings of the Holocaust. Asked whether Jews were historically responsible for bringing about their persecution, 31 percent of Poles agreed, while 67 percent agreed with the statement that during World War II, “people from our nation suffered as much as Jews.”

Similar attitudes towards the Holocaust were prevalent in Greece (67 percent), Hungary (80 percent), Romania (82 percent) and Austria (77 percent).

The polling also showed that hostility to Israel rooted in antisemitism remained a widespread phenomenon across Europe, with 81 percent of Spanish respondents, 75 percent of Italian respondents, 78 percent of Czech respondents and 86 percent of Polish respondents demonstrating what the survey called “antisemitic hostility against Israel.” This included widespread agreement with such statements as “Israelis behave like Nazis towards the Palestinians” and “When I think of Israel’s politics, I understand why some people hate the Jews.”

Jewish and Israeli leaders who attended the EJA’s launch of the survey sounded a pessimistic note on the implications of the data.

“One thing is certain: While the European institutions and politicians devote significant resources and spare no effort in the fight against antisemitism, the situation in Europe is not improving,” commented Joel Mergui, president of the European Center for Judaism in Paris.

Margaritis Schinas — the vice-president of the European Commission, the EU’s executive body — reminded those at the launch that last week, the Commission published a [nine-year strategy](#) to combat antisemitism.

“We will prevent all types of antisemitism including Israel related antisemitism which is the most common form, using all the tools at our disposal,” Schinas said. “We know that Europe can only prosper when its Jewish communities can prosper too.”

The meeting also heard from the President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, who noted the continued “threats to Jewish religious and cultural life in Europe including calls, legislations and judgments that support a ban on Jewish circumcision and productions of kosher meat.”

Herzog added that he urged those present “to use all of the tools at your disposal to ensure that European Jews can live an open, free and secure Jewish life.” He pledged too that “Israel will always be a home for you and will always be by your side.”

The survey was commissioned by the Action and Protection League, the EJA’s partner organization, and conducted in cooperation with Ipsos, led by Professor András Kovács of Central European University.

Photo : Antisemitic graffiti on a house in the historic center of Lyon in France. Photo: Twitter

Catholic bishops’ commission laments EU religious freedom envoy vacancy

The Catholic World Report (08.09.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3yUt3cJ> - A Catholic bishops’ commission said on Wednesday that it is a “pity” that the “key position” of EU religious freedom envoy is now vacant.

The Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union ([COMECE](#)) congratulated the outgoing envoy Christos Stylianides on Sept. 8 on his next role as head of Greece’s new climate crisis ministry.

But the commission expressed regret that the post of special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU now lay vacant “after much effort to find a suitable candidate.”

“We urge the EU Commission to swiftly appoint a new one with reinforced mandate/resources,” COMECE wrote on its Twitter account.

ADF International, a Christian legal group, lamented Stylianides’ departure months after he took up the role.

"The current plight of Christians, Shia Muslims, and other religious minorities in Afghanistan highlights the need for a special envoy to quickly get to work, focusing on the needs of the most persecuted worldwide," [said](#) Adina Portaru, the group's senior counsel in Brussels, Belgium.

"A swift reappointment is crucial in showing real commitment to improving the precarious situations religious minorities are facing worldwide."

The special envoy role was created in 2016 to protect freedom of religion or belief worldwide on behalf of the EU, an economic and political union of 27 countries.

Ján Figel, the special envoy from 2016 to 2019, [helped](#) Asia Bibi, a Catholic mother of five, to leave Pakistan after her acquittal on blasphemy charges.

Stylianides, a Cypriot politician, was appointed to the role in May, ending a two-year vacancy.

Announcing the appointment, the European Commission, the EU's executive branch, said: "The special envoy will establish a dialogue with national authorities and other stakeholders in countries suffering from discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief."

"He will support for intercultural and interreligious dialogue processes, including encouraging dialogue between representatives of different faiths and the setting up of joint initiatives."

"He will put in place measures to target de-radicalization and prevention of extremism on grounds of religion or belief in third countries. In cooperation with authorities from third countries, he will promote religious diversity and tolerance within educational programs and curricula."

At the time of the appointment, COMECE president Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich said that the EU bishops looked forward to working with Stylianides.

"We wish him success in this important role of promoting a fundamental right and a core value of the European Union threatened in many parts of the world and we look forward to work closely together," the Luxembourg archbishop [commented](#).

Portaru noted that last month Josep Borrell Fontelles, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, [said](#) that "The EU works relentlessly to address violations and abuses of freedom of religion or belief."

"We hope the EU will live up to this promise and urge the European Commission to strengthen the position of the special envoy and build on the important work already achieved," she said.

"The victims on the ground are in dire need of a decisive response from the EU. With its special envoy, the EU can lead in the international response. That leadership is needed now more than ever."

Robert Clarke, deputy director of ADF International, added: "The special envoy has played a crucial role in bringing the horrors of religious persecution to light at the European level."

"The role has created awareness around some of the worst and most persistent violations of fundamental rights around the world and helped focus EU efforts to counter them. The

EU should not only continue, but intensify efforts to protect freedom of religion or belief around the world.”

“The reappointment of a special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU is now more necessary than ever.”

Photo : Christos Stylianides at the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, Sept. 30, 2014. / European Union 2014 – European Parliament (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

RELATED ARTICLE

[BREAKING: EU religious freedom envoy position now vacant while Afghan faith minorities face deepening crisis](#)

EU can do more to promote religious freedom

By SHARON ROSEN

Euobserver (30.08.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3jqGuwx> - Reading policy analyses and seeing terms like "religious persecution" and "religious extremism/fundamentalism" proliferate, you might be forgiven for dividing people of faith between victimised minorities and radicalised aggressors.

Indeed, this framing has influenced much (Western) international policy on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).

Recently, however, this narrative has been challenged by the recognition of religious actors' potential to positively influence the pressing societal issues of today - not least because, according to Religions for Peace, they are among the most trusted members of their communities.

FoRB - which includes the right to practice one's belief, as well as the right not to believe - is a fundamental requisite for peaceful coexistence.

At their essence, peaceful societies protect all human rights and enable diversity to flourish. When religious freedom is threatened, social cohesion suffers, and conflict grows.

Many actors - including Search for Common Ground, the world's largest peace-building organisation - now realise the valuable contributions religious actors make to societies.

While a secular organisation, over the past decades we have worked with hundreds of thousands of religious actors across five continents, and recognise the strategic importance of constructively engaging such a large and influential sector of society.

We also understand that engaging religious actors can be daunting. Decision-makers in secular institutions like the EU may not see the benefits of involving them, or feel uncomfortable doing so.

Indeed, it would be naive not to acknowledge the sensitivities and challenges of engaging certain religious actors. As the Pew Research Center notes that 84 percent of the world identify with a religious community, it would be equally naive not to take them into account, it would be equally naive not to engage with them at all.

The appointment of Christos Stylianides as the new special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief reaffirms the EU's role as a major international advocate for religious freedom.

As the new special envoy takes office, here are three ways the EU can take action to acknowledge the key role FoRB plays in wider social issues.

Three ways

Firstly, FoRB must be understood as a fundamental right like any other, rejecting the trend to see it as inimical to women's or LGBTQI rights, or freedom of expression - or, obversely, superior to other rights.

Recognising FoRB's interconnection with other rights enables us to address overlapping concerns and intersectional claims.

Search will take such an approach as part of a new secular and interfaith partnership: the Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA).

JISRA will work with religious actors, including women and youth, across seven conflict regions in Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia to strengthen their ability to engage in dialogue on religious tolerance and peace, as well as support them in their advocacy around FoRB.

Secondly, FoRB must be acknowledged as a key component of peaceful and resilient societies.

The EU's Global Exchange on Religion and Society reflects a growing understanding of the value of engaging religious actors on a wide range of societal issues.

In addition, the Council Conclusions on an EU Approach to Cultural Heritage in conflicts and crises, adopted in June, highlight the need for interfaith dialogue and the inclusion of religious minorities as part of the EU's external push for peace, democracy and sustainable development.

Our years of experience organising inter-religious freedom round tables in Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan, Jordan, and Lebanon, or advocating with faith leaders for the protection of holy sites in Jerusalem and Nigeria, confirm their importance.

As with all approaches to FoRB and peace-building generally, women, youth, and other vulnerable groups like religious minorities, need to be included in these exchanges.

These groups often experience unique violations of their rights and, when included, bring new perspectives and unforeseen solutions to conflicts.

Thirdly, EU institutions and staff must receive adequate training on FoRB, and specifically on its role in conflict transformation.

Increasing their faith literacy as well as their understanding of religious engagement's value would be in line with the 2013 guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief which committed the European External Action Service to developing training materials for field and headquartered staff.

Trainings such as the joint Search for Common Ground and the US Institute for Peace's recently launched free online course on Religious Engagement in Peacebuilding - A Common Ground Approach provide an introduction for anyone interested in religious engagement and FoRB in conflict contexts.

Neither peace-building nor advancing FoRB are linear processes. Setbacks require patience, steadfastness and a long-term belief in the possible.

But with its new special envoy at the helm, the EU can play a significant role in effectively moving us towards a world where our diversity of beliefs is valued and respected by all.

Photo : Former European Commissioner Christos Stylianides is appointed special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief. (Photo: European Commission)

The anti-cult ideology and FECRIS: Dangers for religious freedom. A White Paper

Six scholars look at the European anti-cult federation, and conclude it is seriously dangerous for religious liberty

By Luigi Berzano (University of Torino, Italy), Boris Falikov (Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, Russia), Willy Fautré (Human Rights Without Frontiers, Brussels, Belgium), Liudmyla Filipovich (Department of Religious Studies, Institute

of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences, Kiev, Ukraine), Massimo Introvigne (Center for Studies on New Religions, Torino, Italy), and Bernadette Rigal-Cellard (University Bordeaux-Montaigne, Bordeaux, France)

Bitter Winter (23.08.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3sLauGv> - In 2020, the USCIRF (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom), a bipartisan commission of the U.S. federal government, identified the anti-cult ideology as a major threat to international religious liberty (USCIRF 2020).

The anti-cult ideology, or anti-cultism, is based on the idea that "religions" and "cults" are different. "Cults," it claims, are not religions, although they may falsely claim to be religious. While religions are joined freely, "victims" join "cults" because of the latter's coercive practices.

Read the White Paper on [Bitter Winter](#)

Table of contents

The anti-cult ideology

The case of FECRIS

1. FECRIS systematically spread the **anti-cult ideology about "cults" and brainwashing**, a pseudo-scientific theory
2. FECRIS spread **false information**
3. FECRIS **supports totalitarian regimes**
4. FECRIS **has been involved in violence**
5. FECRIS **actively promotes a gatekeeping strategy against the most senior scholars of new religious movements**, labeled "cult apologists."

Photo : Controversial FECRIS Vice President Alexander Dvorkin - commons.wikimedia.org

FECRIS et ses associations membres: la diffamation est dans leur ADN

Affaires de diffamation condamnées par des tribunaux européens en Autriche, en France, en Allemagne et en Espagne

Par Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)

HRWF (08.07.2021) - CAP-LC (Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience), ONG dotée du statut consultatif spécial auprès de l'ECOSOC (Conseil Economique et Social) des Nations Unies, a déposé une [déclaration écrite à la 47^e session du Conseil des Droits de l'Homme des Nations Unies](#), publiée le 21 juin 2021, qui dénonce la politique de diffamation, d'incitation à la stigmatisation et à la haine de la FECRIS (Fédération Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme) et de ses associations membres envers certains groupes religieux et convictionnels.

Cette organisation basée en France et principalement financée par les pouvoirs publics français (plus de 90% de son budget) a été créée à Paris le 30 juin 1994 à la demande de l'association française anti-sectes UNADFI.

Au lieu de publier des informations objectives sur les groupes religieux et de conviction qu'elle qualifie péjorativement de « sectes », la FECRIS et les organisations affiliées ont l'habitude de diffuser des informations déformées ou fausses et de faire de la diffamation. Cependant, elle conserve son statut ECOSOC depuis 2005 malgré le fait que les tribunaux de certains pays de l'Union Européenne aient condamné plusieurs de ses déclarations désobligeantes. Voir ci-après [une liste non exhaustive d'affaires qui ont été portées devant les tribunaux](#) dans des langues accessibles à l'auteur, mais ce n'est que la partie émergée de l'iceberg de leurs déclarations diffamatoires qui n'ont jamais été poursuivies en justice.

Autriche

Sur le banc des accusés en 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2004 et 2005 : Ancien vice-président de la FECRIS

F.G., troisième président de la FECRIS (2005-2009) et membre du conseil d'administration de GSK (Gesellschaft gegen Sekten und Kultgefahren), une organisation autrichienne affiliée à la FECRIS, a été condamné à plusieurs reprises pour diffamation à l'encontre de l'[Église chrétienne de Brunstad](#) (connue en Autriche sous le nom d'« Église norvégienne » ou des « Amis de Smith ») en 1996, 1997, 1998 (deux fois), 2000 (deux fois), 2004 et [2005](#). Ce récidiviste impénitent a été condamné à plusieurs reprises à payer des amendes, à s'abstenir d'attaquer cette Église, à retirer les accusations diffamatoires du site Internet de GSK et aussi à publier les décisions de justice en sa défaveur.

F.G., ingénieur à la retraite, est un catholique convaincu. Il n'était pas d'accord que sa fille W.G. rejoigne les Amis de Smith et se marie avec l'un de ses membres. Le 27 mai 1999, elle a enregistré un témoignage chez un notaire dans lequel elle a démenti les allégations de son père contre ce mouvement.

Source : [Freedom of Religion or Belief Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality, A Case Study : FECRIS, pp 324-327](#) et [Kurzinformation über die Gerichtsprozesse der Norweger Bewegung](#).

France

Sur le banc des accusés en 1997 : Président de l'ADFI Nord, affiliée à la FECRIS

Le 15 janvier 1997, la Cour d'appel de Douai a condamné la présidente de l'ADFI Nord pour diffamation envers l'Association des Témoins de Jéhovah de France. Elle a été condamnée à payer la somme symbolique de 1 FF. ([Cour d'Appel de Douai, 4^e Chambre - Dossier Nr 96/02832 - Arrêt 15.01.1997.](#))

Sur le banc des accusés en 2001 : Président de l'UNADFI, affiliée à la FECRIS

Dans une affaire de diffamation à l'encontre d'un membre de l'Eglise de Scientologie, la Présidente de l'UNADFI a été condamnée à payer une amende de 762,24 EUR et, en plus, de 1524,49 EUR à la victime en réparation du préjudice moral. ([Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris, 17^e Chambre - Dossier Nr 0014523016 - Jugement 20.11.2001](#))

Le 5 février 2003, la Cour d'appel de Paris a confirmé ce jugement. ([Cour d'appel de Paris, 11^e chambre/Section A - Dossier Nr 01/03757 - Arrêt 05.02.2003](#))

Sur le banc des accusés en 2002 : Vice-président du GEMPPI, affilié à la FECRIS

Le 29 mars 2002, le Tribunal de Grande Instance de Marseille (TGI) a jugé diffamatoires les propos concernant l'association des Témoins de Jéhovah tenus par J.C. lors d'une conférence qu'il a tenue à Marseille. Il a accusé l'association des Témoins de Jéhovah d'escroquerie, d'avoir employé illégalement du personnel non déclaré pendant des années et d'avoir utilisé une traduction farfelue de la Bible. Ces déclarations ont été reproduites dans *La Provence* du 28 janvier 2001 et n'ont pas été démenties par J.C.

Le tribunal a déclaré J.C. coupable du délit de diffamation envers l'association des Témoins de Jéhovah pour la déclaration suivante : « Il existe une fraude qui dure depuis des années concernant l'emploi de personnes non déclarées à l'URSSAF. »

Il a été condamné à payer une amende de 450 EUR à titre de sanction, la somme symbolique de 1 EUR à l'association et le montant de 600 EUR en vertu de l'article 475 (1) du Code de procédure pénale.

Il est à noter que J.C. a été vice-président du GEMPPI, président de l'ADFI et membre du conseil d'orientation de la MIVILUDES. Il est professeur à l'Institut français de civilisation musulmane à Lyon. Il a également été le responsable régional de l'Institut de formation des professeurs de religion de Dijon.

(Tribunal de Grande Instance de Marseille, 8^e chambre - Dossier Nr 2972/02 - Jugement correctionnel 29.03.2002)

Sur le banc des accusés en 2007 : ancien député et président de l'UNADFI, affiliée à la FECRIS

Le 18 juillet 2007, la Cour d'appel de Rouen a condamné C.P., accusé de diffamation répétée dans les médias, à verser 1500 EUR (+ 800 EUR pour l'application de l'article 475-1 du Code de procédure pénale) à l'association centrale des Témoins de Jéhovah en France et 750 EUR (+ 300 EUR pour l'application de l'article 475-1 du Code de procédure pénale) à chacune des sept associations locales des Témoins de Jéhovah en réparation financière du préjudice moral. ([Cour d'appel de Rouen, chambre correctionnelle - Dossier Nr 07/00341 - Arrêt 18.07.2007](#))

Sur le banc des accusés en 2007 : président de l'UNADFI, affiliée à la FECRIS

Le 3 avril 2007, la Cour de cassation a jugé diffamatoires les propos tenus par C.P., ancienne députée et présidente de l'UNADFI, et par A.F., membre de la MILS (prédécesseur de la MIVILUDES) dans leur ouvrage « Sectes, démocratie et mondialisation » publié en 2002. Dans cet ouvrage, le mouvement philosophique AMORC (Ordre rosicrucien) était accusé, entre autres, de poursuivre des intérêts personnels, de soutenir des théories racistes et de menacer les libertés, d'être structuré comme une mafia et de fonctionner comme une organisation criminelle.

Dans son arrêt, la Cour de cassation a cassé et annulé la décision de la Cour d'appel de Paris du 22 mars 2006. L'affaire a été renvoyée devant la Cour d'appel, mais les auteurs du livre ont conclu un accord avec l'AMORC. Le 7 mai 2008, ils ont signé [une déclaration](#) par laquelle ils reconnaissent que leurs propos sur l'AMORC avaient été diffamatoires comme l'avait jugé la Cour de cassation. Ils ont conclu en disant qu'à la lumière de nouvelles informations recueillies depuis la publication de leur livre, ils avaient convenu que l'AMORC n'était pas une organisation sectaire. ([Cour de Cassation, chambre civile 1 - Pourvoi Nr 06-15226 - Décision de la Cour : 03.04.2007](#))

Sur le banc des accusés en 2015 et 2017 : L'UNADFI, affiliée à la FECRIS

En novembre 2015, l'UNADFI a été condamnée par la Cour d'appel de Paris pour « abus de procédure judiciaire », pour avoir persisté à se porter partie civile de mauvaise foi contre l'Église de Scientologie et deux particuliers. L'UNADFI a dû verser 3.000 EUR à chacune des parties et 4.000 EUR sur la base de l'article 700 du Code de procédure pénale. ([Cour d'appel de Paris, Pôle 2, Chambre 2, - Dossier Nr 14/09557 - Arrêt 20.11.2015](#))

Cette condamnation a été confirmée par la Cour de cassation le 12 janvier 2017. ([Cour de Cassation, 2^e chambre civile - Dossier Nr 10019 F - Arrêt 12.01.2017](#))

Allemagne

Sur le banc des accusés en 2001 : AGPF/ SEKTEN-INFO ESSEN, affiliée à la FECRIS

Dans un jugement définitif rendu le 19 décembre 2001 par le tribunal d'État de Munich, il a été ordonné à Mme H-M C., fondatrice de Sect-info Essen, de cesser de répéter ou de diffuser une série de contre-vérités sur Takar Singh (un groupe religieux oriental), faute de quoi elle serait condamnée à une amende pouvant atteindre 500 000 DM et, à défaut de paiement, à une peine de prison pouvant aller jusqu'à 6 mois. Il s'agissait d'allégations d'activités criminelles, de torture d'enfants ou de viol publiées dans un livre sur ledit groupe dont la vente a également été interdite. Le titre était « Les nouveaux prophètes » (en allemand : Die Neuen Heilsbringer : Auswege oder Wege ins Aus ?) (**Munich I Landgericht/ Tribunal du Land, chambre civile 9 - Affaire Nr. Az : 908736/99 - Entscheidung/ Décision de la Cour : 19.01.2001**)

Source : [Liberté de religion ou de croyance, mouvements anti-sectes et neutralité de l'État, une étude de cas : FECRIS](#), pp 191-192

Sur le banc des accusés en 2020 : FECRIS

Le 27 novembre 2020, le tribunal de district de Hambourg a condamné la FECRIS pour avoir diffamé l'association centrale des Témoins de Jéhovah dans des déclarations publiques faites dans le cadre de ses conférences de 2009 à 2017 et publiées ultérieurement sur son site internet. Voir [Témoins de Jéhovah en Allemagne contre FECRIS \(Dossier réf. 324 O 434/18\)](#) au sujet d'une liste de 32 déclarations prétendument diffamatoires : 17 ont été entièrement justifiées et une a été partiellement justifiée par la Cour.

Comme les Témoins de Jéhovah avaient affirmé que 32 déclarations de la FECRIS étaient diffamatoires, et que le tribunal en a jugé 17 comme telles, une partiellement diffamatoire et 14 non diffamatoires, la FECRIS a déclaré avoir « gagné » le procès sur 14 points. Tout en gardant le silence sur les 17 autres points déclarés diffamatoires par le tribunal, la FECRIS a donné la fausse impression, dans un [communiqué de presse](#), que le tribunal de Hambourg avait validé comme vraies les 14 déclarations qu'il avait considérées comme non diffamatoires. Ce communiqué de presse tardif (30 mai 2021) n'était qu'une réaction à un rapport sur la condamnation de la FECRIS publié par Bitter Winter. ([Hamburg Landgericht / tribunal du Land – Dossier Ref. 324 O 434/18 – Entscheidung / Décision du tribunal : 27.11.2020](#))

Il y a davantage d'informations sur cette affaire en Allemagne dans [la base de données de nouvelles de HRWF](#).

Espagne

Sur le banc des accusés en 1999 (Cour européenne) : Pro Juventud, affiliée à la FECRIS

Pro Juventud, désormais AIS - Pro Juventud, organisation espagnole affiliée à la FECRIS, a été jugée par la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme en 1999 dans l'affaire [Ribera Blume et autres contre l'Espagne](#) pour avoir porté une « responsabilité directe et immédiate » dans une affaire d'enlèvement, d'emprisonnement et de tentative de déprogrammation de membres d'un groupe religieux dans des conditions de privation illégale de liberté et de détention. Le changement forcé de religion est interdit par le droit international. ([Cour européenne des droits de l'Homme - Dossier 37680/97 - Décision de la Cour : 14.10.1999](#))

Conclusions

Pendant plus de 25 ans, la FECRIS et ses organisations membres ont diffusé des déclarations diffamatoires sur des groupes religieux et de conviction sous forme imprimée, dans les médias et lors d'auditions parlementaires. Avant de rejoindre la FECRIS, un certain nombre d'associations et leurs dirigeants avaient déjà été condamnés dans des affaires de diffamation par des tribunaux en Suède, en Suisse et dans d'autres pays ([Liberté de religion ou de croyance, mouvements anti-sectes et neutralité de l'État, une étude de cas : FECRIS, page 192](#))

Les exemples de décisions de justice énumérés dans cet article montrent qu'il est dans leur ADN de stigmatiser les groupes religieux ou convictionnels que leurs membres fondateurs et les membres de leur conseil d'administration n'aiment pas pour des raisons personnelles ou par expérience personnelle. Une telle obstination à diffamer et stigmatiser dans les médias un certain nombre de groupes ne suivant pas la ligne

traditionnelle a eu un impact négatif et parfois dramatique sur la vie de ceux qui ont librement choisi de suivre leurs enseignements, bien que cela fasse partie de leur droit à la liberté de conscience, de pensée et de croyance.

Si des déclarations diffamatoires similaires visaient des organisations athées ou la foi des juifs ou des musulmans avec la même virulence, cela déclencherait à juste titre un tollé dans la classe politique et les médias. Les adeptes des groupes religieux non traditionnels veulent simplement jouir du même droit à la liberté de conscience, de pensée et de croyance.

La FECRIS et ses organisations membres n'ont pas seulement été condamnées par les tribunaux. Leurs pratiques contraires à l'éthique ont été condamnées à plusieurs reprises à l'OSCE (Organisation pour la Sécurité et la Coopération en Europe) et en 2020 par l'[USCIRF \(Commission américaine sur la liberté religieuse internationale\)](#).

Il est temps que les pouvoirs publics cessent de financer la FECRIS et ses organisations membres, qu'ils les tiennent à distance et qu'ils s'appuient sur des sources et des experts universitaires crédibles.

FECRIS and affiliates: Defamation is in their DNA

Defamation cases condemned by European courts in Austria, France, Germany, and Spain

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (08.07.2021) - CAP-LC (Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience), an NGO with special consultative status at the United Nations' ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council), has filed a [written statement to the 47th Session of the United Nations' Human Rights Council](#) published on 21 June 2021 which denounces the defamation policy, the incitement to stigmatization and hatred towards certain religious and belief groups by FECRIS (European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sects) and its member associations.

This umbrella organization based in France and mainly financed by French public powers (over 90% of its budget) was created in Paris on 30 June 1994 on request of the French anti-cult association UNADFI.

Instead of publishing objective information about religious and belief groups they derogatorily label as "cults" (in French, *sectes*), FECRIS and its affiliates are used to spreading distorted or fake news and defamation. However, it has still kept its ECOSOC status since 2005 despite the fact that courts in a number of EU countries have condemned several of their disparaging statements. See hereafter [a non-exhaustive list of cases that were taken to court](#) in languages that were accessible to the author but it is just the tip of the iceberg of their defamatory statements that were never prosecuted.

Austria

In the dock in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2004 and 2005: Former vice-president of FECRIS

F.G., the third president of FECRIS (2005-2009) and board member of Austrian FECRIS' affiliate GSK (Gesellschaft gegen Sekten und Kultgefahren) has been convicted a number of times for defamation against the [Brunstad Christian Church](#) (known in Austria as "the Norwegian church" or "Smith's Friends") in 1996, 1997, 1998 (twice), 2000 (twice), 2004 and [2005](#). This unrepentant recidivist was repeatedly condemned to pay fines, to refrain from attacking that Church, to remove defamatory accusations from GSK's website and also to publish court decisions in his disadvantage.

F.G., a retired engineer, is a committed Catholic. He disagreed with his daughter W.G. joining the Smith's Friends and getting married with one of its members. On 27 May 1999, she registered a testimony at a notary in which she denied the allegations of her father against this movement.

Source: [Freedom of Religion or Belief Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality, A Case Study: FECRIS, pp 324-327](#) and [Kurzinformation über die Gerichtsprozesse der Norweger Bewegung.](#)

France

In the dock in 1997: President of ADFI Nord, FECRIS affiliate

On 15 January 1997, the Douai Court of Appeal convicted the president of ADFI Nord for defamation regarding the Association of the Jehovah's Witnesses in France. She was condemned to pay the symbolic amount of 1 FF. ([Cour d'Appel de Douai, 4e Chambre – Dossier Nr 96/02832 – Arrêt 15.01.1997](#)).

In the Dock in 2001: President of UNADFI, FECRIS affiliate

In a case of defamation against a member of the Church of Scientology, the President of UNADFI was condemned to pay a fine of 762,24 EUR and additionally 1524,49 EUR as financial compensation for moral damage to the victim. ([Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris, 17^e Chambre – Dossier Nr 0014523016 – Jugement 20.11.2001](#))

On 5 February 2003, the Paris Court of Appeal confirmed this judgment. ([Cour d'appel de Paris, 11e chambre/Section A - Dossier Nr 01/03757 – Arrêt 05.02.2003](#))

In the dock in 2002: Vice-president of GEMPPI, FECRIS affiliate

On 29 March 2002, the Regional Court of Marseille (TGI) found defamatory the statements regarding the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses that were made by J.C. during a conference he held in Marseille. He accused the association of Jehovah's Witnesses of fraud, illegally employing unregistered staff for years, and using a hare-brained translation of the Bible. These statements were reproduced in *La Provence* of 28 January 2001 and were not denied by J.C.

The Court found J.C. guilty of the offence of libel towards the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses for the following statement "There is a fraud involving the employment of individuals who are not registered with the URSSAF which has been going on for years."

He was ordered to pay a fine of 450 EUR as punishment, the symbolic sum of 1 EUR to the Association and the amount of 600 EUR under section 475 (1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

It is noteworthy that J.C. was the vice-president of GEMPPPI, president of ADFI and member of MIVILUDES' orientation council. He is a Professor at the French Institute of Muslim Civilization in Lyon. He was also the regional head of the Institute for the training of teachers of religion in Dijon.

[\(Tribunal de Grande Instance de Marseille, 8^e chambre – Dossier Nr 2972/02 – Jugement correctionnel 29.03.2002\) – English translation](#)

In the dock in 2007: Former MP and President of UNADFI, FECRIS affiliate

On 18 July 2007, the Court of Appeal of Rouen condemned C.P., accused of repeated defamation in the media, to the payment of 1500 EUR (+ 800 EUR for the implementation of Article 475-1 of the Criminal Procedure Code) to the central association of Jehovah's Witnesses in France and 750 EUR (+300 EUR for the implementation of Article 475-1 of the Criminal Procedure Code) to each of the seven local associations of Jehovah's Witnesses as financial compensation for moral damage. **[\(Cour d'appel de Rouen, chambre correctionnelle - Dossier Nr 07/00341 – Arrêt 18.07.2007\)](#)**

In the dock in 2007: President of UNADFI, FECRIS affiliate

On 3 April 2007, the Court of Cassation found defamatory the statements which were made by C.P., then member of Parliament and president of UNADFI, and by A.F., member of the MILS (the predecessor of MIVILUDES) in their book "Sectes, Democracy and Globalization" (Sectes, démocratie et mondialisation) published in 2002. In that book, the philosophical movement AMORC (Rosicrucian Order) was accused, among other things, of pursuing personal interests, of supporting racist theories and threatening freedoms, of being structured like a mafia and of functioning like a criminal organization. In its decision, the Court of Cassation quashed and nullified the decision of the Court of Appeal of Paris 22 March 2006. The case was sent back to the Court of Appeal but the authors of the book concluded a deal with AMORC. On 7 May 2008, they signed [a declaration](#) by which they recognized that their statements about AMORC had been defamatory as the Court of Cassation had ruled. They concluded by saying that in the light of new information gathered since the publication of their book they had agreed AMORC was not a cult-like organization. **[\(Cour de Cassation, chambre civile 1 – Pourvoi Nr 06-15226 – Cour decision: 03.04.2007\)](#)**

In the dock in 2015 and 2017: UNADFI, FECRIS affiliate

In November 2015, UNADFI was convicted by the Court of Appeal of Paris for 'abuse of legal process,' for having persisted in bad faith as a plaintiff against the Church of Scientology and two private persons. UNADFI had to pay 3,000 EUR to each of the parties and 4,000 EUR on the basis of article 700 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. **[\(Cour d'appel de Paris, Pôle 2, Chambre 2, - Dossier Nr 14/09557 – Arrêt 20.11.2015\)](#)**

This conviction was upheld by the Court of Cassation on 12 January 2017. **[\(Cour de Cassation, 2e chambre civile – Dossier Nr 10019 F - Arrêt 12.01.2017\)](#)**

Germany

In the dock in 2001: AGPF/ SEKTE-INFO ESSEN, FECRIS affiliates

In a final judgment issued on 19 December 2001 by the Munich State Court, Ms. H-M C. founder of Sect-info Essen, was ordered to stop repeating or spreading a wide variety of untruths about Takar Singh (an Eastern religious group) or else she would be fined up to 500,000 DM and, if not paid, be sentenced to jail for up to 6 months. These included allegations such as accusing a person of being a criminal, of torturing children or of rape. The sale of the book they were distributing about the group was also forbidden. The title was "The new prophets" (German: Die Neuen Heilsbringer: Auswege oder Wege ins Aus?) (**Munich I Landgericht/ Land Court, civil chamber 9 - Case Nr. Az: 908736/99 – Entscheidung/ Court decision: 19.01.2001**)

Source: [Freedom of Religion or Belief Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality, A Case Study: FECRIS](#), pp 191-192

In the dock in 2020: FECRIS

On 27 November 2020, the District Court of Hamburg condemned FECRIS for defaming the general movement of Jehovah's Witnesses in public statements made in the framework of its conferences from 2009 to 2017 that were posted later on its website. See [Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany v. FECRIS \(File ref. 324 O 434/18\)](#) about a long list of 32 claimed defamatory statements: 17 were fully justified and one was partially justified by the Court.

Since the Jehovah's Witnesses had claimed that 32 FECRIS statements were defamatory, and the court found 17 of them defamatory, one partially defamatory, and 14 non-defamatory, FECRIS declared that it had "won" the case on 14 points. While keeping silent about the 17 other points declared defamatory by the court, FECRIS gave the false impression in a [press release](#) that the Court of Hamburg had validated the 14 statements it had considered non-defamatory as true. This late press release (30 May 2021) was just a reaction to a report about FECRIS' condemnation published by Bitter Winter. (**Hamburg Landgericht/ Land Court – File Ref. 324 O 434/18 – Entscheidung/ Court decision: 27.11.2020**)

More about this case in Germany in [HRWF's database of news](#).

Spain

In the dock in 1999 (European Court): Pro Juventud, FECRIS affiliate

Pro Juventud, now AIS – Pro Juventud, a Spanish FECRIS affiliate, has been found by the European Court of Human Rights in the 1999 case [Ribera Blume and others versus Spain](#) to bear "direct and immediate responsibility" in a case of kidnapping, imprisonment and deprogramming attempt of members of a religious group in conditions of illegal deprivation of freedom and detention. Forced change of religion is forbidden by international law. (**European Court of Human Rights – File 37680/97 – Court decision: 14.10.1999**)

Conclusions

During more than 25 years, FECRIS and its affiliates have been spreading defamatory statements about religious and belief groups in printed form, in the media and in parliamentary hearings. Before joining FECRIS, a number of associations and their leaders had already been condemned in defamation cases by courts in Sweden, Switzerland and other countries ([Freedom of Religion or Belief Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality, A Case Study: FECRIS, page 192](#))

The examples of court decisions listed in this article show that it is in their DNA to stigmatize religious or belief groups that their founding members and board members do not like for personal reasons or through personal experience. Such obstinacy in defaming and stigmatizing a number of non-mainline groups in the media has negatively and sometimes dramatically impacted the lives of those who have freely chosen to follow their teachings but this is part of their right to freedom of conscience, thought and belief.

If similar defamatory statements targeted atheist organizations or the faith of Jews or Muslims with the same virulence, this would trigger an outcry in the political class and the media, and rightly so. The followers of non-mainline religious groups just want to enjoy the same right to freedom of conscience, thought and belief.

FECRIS and its affiliates have not only been condemned by courts. Their unethical practices have been repeatedly condemned at the OSCE and in 2020 by [USCIRF \(US Commission on International Religious Freedom\)](#).

It is time for public powers to stop financing FECRIS and its affiliates, to keep them at distance and to rely on credible academic sources and experts.

FECRIS denounced at the United Nations' Human Rights Council

CAP-LC filed a written statement detailing the defamation cases FECRIS and its affiliated organizations lost, and asking France to stop supporting them.

by Massimo Introvigne



Palais des Nations in Geneva, where the UN Human Rights Council meets (credits).

Bitter Winter (28.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3Agkafp> - Readers of *Bitter Winter* are familiar with FECRIS (European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sects), an umbrella organization created in 1994 to put together anti-cult associations in several European (and some non-European) countries. We criticized FECRIS inter alia for supporting China's horrific persecution of Falun Gong and other religious movements. FECRIS promotes the anti-cult ideology, recognized in 2020 by a USCIRF (U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom) document as a major threat for freedom of religion or belief.

CAP-LC (Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience), an NGO with special consultative status at the United Nations' ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council), the same status enjoyed by FECRIS, has now filed a written statement to the 47th Session of the United Nations' Human Rights Council, which was published on 21 June, and asks France to stop its support of FECRIS.

CAP-LC is concerned with the reorganization of the French governmental anti-cult mission MIVILUDES, now under the supervision of the Minister Delegate for Citizenship at the Ministry of the Interior, Marlène Schiappa. She has increased MIVILUDES' present budget ten-fold, to euro 1 million euro per year, CAP-LC reports, and has announced "that this million will be allocated to initiatives that would be run by anti-cult associations, namely CCMM and UNADFI," both FECRIS affiliates.

CAP-LC notes that CCMM and UNADFI refer to themselves as NGOs but are in fact GONGOs (Governmental Non-Government Associations), since 90% of their funding comes from the French government. Representatives of both FECRIS affiliates have been included in the newly appointed Orientation Committee of the MIVILUDES. FECRIS is registered in France and is also directly funded by the French government. (...)

Read full article [here](#)

Europe will not have a Religious Liberty Day

The proposal by the Conservatives and Reformists group was rejected before reaching the floor of the European Parliament.

By Marco Respinti

Bitter Winter (17.06.21) - <https://bit.ly/35zZKjn> - It seems that the European Parliament (EP) does not have a special interest in religious liberty, despite it being an integral part of the European Convention of Human Rights.

There is an international day for almost everything, but the proposal to establish an International Day for Religious Liberty was recently rejected.

The idea was launched by the Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance. Upheld by the Conservatives and Reformists group, which transformed it into a political proposal, joined by the European People's Party and by the Identity and Democracy group, it was rejected by Renew Europe, the Socialists, the Greens, and the Left.

Underlining that religious freedom is a basic human right, protected by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the promoters wished to establish the International Day on June 24, the anniversary of the [adoption of the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief](#) by the Council of the European Union in 2013.

Few noticed this rejection, because the proposal was blocked before the next plenary session of the EP, and its text will not even be published.

The Conservatives and Reformists group says it will advance its proposal again in the future.

Photo : *The European Parliament in session* ([credits](#))

Bishops want EU's religious freedom office beefed up

Catholic bishops of the European Union (COMECE) call for sufficient financial resources to defend religious liberty around the world

By Arnaud Bevilacqua

La Croix Int'l (10.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3gdO10k> - Europe's Catholic bishops have congratulated the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, for the recent appointment of a new special envoy to monitor religious freedom abroad. But they are urging her to make sure the post is given sufficient financial resources so that it can effectively do its work.

A "fundamental value" of the EU

In a [June 2 letter](#) to the president, the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) welcomed the fact that Europe is focusing anew on religious freedom, "a fundamental right and a core value of the EU, which is under threat in many parts of the world".

Von der Leyen appointed the new special envoy on May 5, filling a position that had been vacant since December 2019.

COMECE president, [Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ of Luxembourg](#), said the bishops were particularly pleased that the EC president chose Christos Stylianides for the post.

A former European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, the Cypriot MEP is a member of the European People's Party. Cardinal Hollerich noted that he has opened "fresh spaces for cooperation with Churches and Faith-Based Organizations in humanitarian activities".

He said this appointment of a special envoy "on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion and Belief" should give "voice to voiceless individuals and communities whose freedom of thought, conscience, and religion are violated, being subject to intolerance, discrimination and, in some cases, even, persecution".

"Institutional and financial support"

But the Jesuit cardinal said Stylianides will need "reasonable and adequate human and financial resources" in order "to carry on his high responsibility" effectively.

He urged the EU to give the envoy all the support he needs, especially since the issue of religious freedom often touches upon thorny internal questions in each member state.

Without power and without means, Stylianides risks raising hopes that cannot be fulfilled.

"Therefore, it is our hope and kind request to you that the EU Special Envoy have your institutional and financial support to be able to duly perform his responsibility," said the COMECE president.

He said the EU must embrace its role "as a relevant voice in supporting human rights and vulnerable individuals and communities around the world".

COMECE just last year celebrated the 40th anniversary of its foundation.

Members of its standing committee will be in Rome from June 9-11 to meet Vatican officials and religious freedom is expected to be one of the items on the agenda.

They are also expected to meet with Pope Francis while at the Vatican.

Photo : Christos Stylianides, shown here on Feb. 26, 2018, has been named the new European Advocate for Religious Freedom. (Photo by VIRGINIA MAYO/AP)

“To stop islamic terrorism, discriminate against Non-Muslim religious movements”

Laws are passed with the alleged aim of combating Islamic radicalism. They are then used against peaceful religionists labeled as “fundamentalists” or “cults.”

By Massimo Introvigne*

Bitter Winter (06.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3iui4lZ> - The new Flemish legislation on religion and the statements by politicians surrounding its introduction are yet another example of what is emerging as a fascinating, if paradoxical, social and political phenomenon: the discrimination of some non-Muslim religions under the pretext of combating terrorism based on ultra-fundamentalist Islam.

In several European countries, terrorist attacks by groups and individuals claiming to act on the basis of an ultra-fundamentalist interpretation of Islam (one not shared by most Muslims) have claimed hundreds of victims and shocked public opinion. Politicians concerned for their votes understand that “something should be done.”

The first reaction is to introduce legislation against “Islamic fundamentalism.” This is rarely effective, because the ultra-fundamentalist organizations responsible for terrorism such as al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State operate underground. A law banning “extremist” organizations would not affect them. They are already banned everywhere as criminal groups.

There is no evidence that banning other conservative Islamic groups would help combating terrorism. There is no evidence either that prohibiting the use of the veil or of Islamic modesty swimming suits to Muslim women would have any effect on terrorism. I have studied ultra-fundamentalist terrorism and published several books on the issue, dealing inter alia with the personality of terrorists responsible for some of the bloodiest attacks. Only a handful of them were members of conservative organizations, or had been educated in conservative mosques. Some, like several members of the al-Qa’ida commandos, were scions of rich families, in some cases educated in exclusive international private schools. Recently, the Islamic State recruited desperate, marginal immigrants via the Internet, people with little knowledge of Islamic theology and no ties with any Muslim organizations.

On the contrary, laws against conservative Islam may antagonize Muslims, and make recruitment by terrorist organizations easier rather than more difficult. We all know that things about terrorism may change quickly, but it is a fact of life that so far Italy has had zero terrorist attacks by ultra-fundamentalist Muslims (we had some by politically motivated Palestinians in the past century, but this was a different story). As a scholar and a member of the former Ministry of the Interior’s Committee on Islam in Italy, I have been often interviewed on why this happens. I am persuaded that the conciliatory attitude towards Muslims exhibited by different Italian governments has significantly contributed to making recruitment by terrorist organizations unsuccessful in our country.

There is also another problem with laws targeting conservative Islam. They immediately encounter Constitutional problems. Constitutions, not to mention the European Convention on Human Rights, prohibit legislation singling out a specific religion. Politicians thus should frame their laws in general terms, targeting religions that are "separatist" (a favorite word in France) or "extremist."

Laws are thus introduced, and sold to parliaments and voters as needed tools to "combat radical Islam." Once passed, they have little or no effect on radical Islam or terrorism. However, they are used to harass and discriminate against peaceful religious movements.

This is becoming almost a sociological law. The Flanders, where the law is promoted as needed after the growth of radical Islam and bloody terrorist attacks in Brussels, are not the first case. In Russia, laws against "extremism" created after 9/11 were expanded after one of the most horrific modern terrorist attacks, the Beslan school siege of 2004, which left 334 dead, most of them children, to let the government outlaw religious organizations guilty not of physical violence only, but also of "verbal" extremism. Arguing that one's religion was better or superior to other religions was considered a key test for extremism. The law was not used to ban al-Qa'ida or the Chechen organizations guilty of terrorism (they were already banned), but led to peaceful Muslim groups such as the followers of Turkish mystic Said Nursi, and non-Muslim religions such as the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Church of Scientology being harassed (the Jehovah's Witnesses were outlawed in 2017; dozens of them are in jail).

In Denmark, it was claimed [earlier this year](#) that a law compelling all religions to translate into Danish their sermons and publish them in advance was needed to stop incendiary sermons by radical imams. Catholics and Protestants immediately objected that those who would really suffer would be immigrant and other Christian communities catering to linguistic minorities. The most radical imams would not be affected, as they operate clandestinely anyway.

In the Italian region of Lombardy, a law was passed making it extremely difficult for non-Catholic religious community to be authorized to open new places of worship. It was nicknamed the "anti-mosque law," but in fact Muslims in Lombardy, most of them poor immigrants, were not very much interested in building mosques. The law, however, greatly affected the booming Evangelical community.

In France, the law on "separatism" is still being discussed, but is another egregious example of how a law popular with certain media because it would allegedly keep radical Islam under control would be in fact easily used to discriminate against small Christian communities and groups labeled as "cults" (sectes). In particular, as in the case of the Flemish draft law, it may impose limitations on groups that need to be economically supported by their co-religionists abroad.

In France, finally, the veil was lifted, and we learned that the paradox was not an unintended consequence of an amateurish approach to the problem of ultra-fundamentalist Islam. We were told, in so many words, that selling to the voters a law "against radical Islam" and using it later against non-Islamic religious group was totally intentional. The lady who serves as Minister Delegate in Charge of Citizenship at the Ministry of the Interior, Marlène Schiappa, [told the French media loudly and clearly](#) that the law is also intended for, and will be used against, groups classified as "cults" (sectes).

So, finally the cat is out of the bag. What we are witnessing is a huge fraud. With a disturbing Islamophobic language, the public opinion is agitated against the ghost of "radical Islam," and told that exceptional measures should be passed. Perhaps not all, but some of those proposing them are aware that these measures will be remarkably ineffective against Islamic radicalism and terrorism. However, they still want to pass them, first for electoral reasons, and second, because they plan to use them against groups they may call "archconservative" (including successful Evangelical and Pentecostal churches), "cults," or *sectes*. If they would openly proclaim their antipathy against high-commitment religion, if not religion in general, their proposals would generate more hostile reactions than real interest, and would likely fail. By waving the red flag of "Islamic terrorism," on the other hand, they may succeed in passing laws that hide a different agenda.

**An introductory paper at the Special Meeting of the Freedom of Religion or Belief Roundtable Belgium "The New Flemish Legislation on Religion: A Cause of Concern," June 2, 2021.*

Photo: *Frans Hogenberg (1535–1590), The Calvinist Iconoclastic Riot of August 20, 1566 in Antwerp, at the start of the Flemish wars of religion.*

Islamic religious education in Europe: an increasing matter of concern

By Leni Franken, senior researcher and teacher assistant at the University of Antwerp (Belgium)

BYU LAW (08.05.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3hGzCun> - Against the backdrop of labor migration, family reunification, and the ongoing refugee crisis, the number of Muslims in Europe has increased over the past decades. This has resulted in a growing number of Muslim schools and Muslim students enrolled in Islamic Religious Education in state schools. In the Netherlands, for instance, the number of state-funded Muslim schools has increased from only a few schools in the 1980s to more than 50 schools today. Comparably, the present number of students enrolled in Islamic Religious Education in Belgian state schools is, with more than 20%, twice as many as ten years ago. In addition, an increasing number of students with a Muslim background are enrolled in non-denominational and non-confessional "religion education" classes, which are organized in Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish state schools.

Given this rather new sociological situation, combined with the presence of (violent) Muslim fundamentalism in Europe, "Islamic Religious Education" has become a matter of concern for politicians, religious stakeholders, policymakers, and academics. Hence the book *Islamic Religious Education in Europe* [1] offers a comparative study of curricula, teaching materials, and teacher training in fourteen European countries. These country reports are followed by multi-disciplinary essays—from the hermeneutical-critical to the postcolonial—addressing challenges posed by teaching about and into Islam.

Education into Islam: essentialist, Sunni-oriented, and of poor quality

A recurring theme in the 14 country reports is that, notwithstanding the rather long experience with Islamic Religious Education *stricto sensu* (i.e. education *into* Islam, organized in a denominational and confessional way), several problems are common: due to a lack of adequate teacher training, teachers are not always suitably skilled; curricula and textbooks—which are often influenced by Turkish Islamic institutions (e.g. *Diyanet*)—are outdated, uncritical, and not adapted to the European context; attention for Muslim minorities such as Shi'a and Alevi is limited, and attention for other religions (with the exemption of Judaism and Christianity) and secular worldviews is almost absent. Most European nations are nowadays concerned about the quality of Islamic Religious Education, which has resulted in the establishment of teacher-training programs and an update of curricula and textbooks. Overall, these are worthwhile initiatives, but there is still much work to be done.

One explanation for the poor quality of Islamic Religious Education is the fact that the different Muslim communities are, in terms of ethnic/national origin, religious practice, and doctrine, very diversified, while at the same time the state requires them to unify in one single community. This has not only led to tensions within officially “recognized” Muslim Communities (e.g. in Austria and Belgium), but it has also led to an uneasy and unprofessional implementation of Islamic Religious Education, which is often Sunni-oriented and essentialist. In this regard, Austria is an interesting case: here, the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (IRCA) and ALEVI are recognized as separate communities, while other claims for recognition, by the Shiites, are pending. By recognizing multiple Islamic communities in this way and by organizing Islamic Religious Education correspondingly, the internal diversity within Islam can be taken into consideration. One should, however, also notice that there are many more forms of practicing Islam (and thus also of Islamic Religious Education). Thus, where to draw the line for recognition remains a challenge, even in a more diversified system of recognition. Most likely, reality may urge representatives to go for pragmatic and consensus-oriented solutions.

Islam Education: marinated in a Lutheran, post-colonial, and essentialist dressing

Unfortunately, education *about* Islam, as part of non-denominational and non-confessional *religious* education, is not without problems. As with education into Islam, there is, in curricula and textbooks, little attention for diversity *within* religions, including Islam. Besides, the so-called “neutral” classes about religion are often marinated in a Lutheran, post-colonial, and essentialist dressing: the default idea is that all religions have a founder, a holy book, a doctrine, and fixed practices, but this is a western/Christian idea that is absent in many religious and secular traditions.

Providentially, this problem is now recognized by most religious scholars, and this awareness steadily reaches religion education classes in schools. In Norway for instance, the new curriculum for the school subject “Knowledge of Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life, and Ethics” emphasizes the diversity between religious and secular worldviews, and also *within* these religions and worldviews. Besides, the student’s understanding of religion and secular worldviews is challenged through analysis of and critical reflection on sources, norms, and the (western) concepts used in (comparative) religious studies.

Education about and into Islam: exclusion or complementarity?

Overall, the analysis of Islamic Religious Education in 14 national contexts (Part I) and the interdisciplinary, reflexive essays (Part II) make clear that both education *into* and

education *about* Islam face several problems and challenges. This, however, does not imply that the baby should be thrown out with the bathwater. Numerous contributions in *Islamic Religious Education in Europe* reveal the urgent need for “religious literacy,” a need that has also been emphasized by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Organizing a state-controlled and mandatory subject about different religions and secular worldviews could offer solutions here, provided it is organized in a “critical, objective and pluralistic manner” (cf. ECtHR, *Kjeldsen, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v. Denmark*, ECtHR, *Folgerø and others v. Norway*) and provided the above-mentioned problems are countered constructively.

Research in England and Sweden (chapters 6 and 13) has shown that Muslim students are not opposed to such a “neutral” school subject, which is not only on the compulsory curriculum in Swedish state schools but also in state-funded denominational schools. In addition to this mandatory school subject, Muslim schools can also organize denominational Islamic Religious Education classes, provided these classes do not oppose the common teaching aims of Swedish education. Interestingly, most Swedish Muslim students consider the classes *into* Islam as a meaningful complement to the mandatory classes *about* religion. What is at stake here is not a story of *exclusion* (either confessional/denomination or non-confessional/non-denominational), but a story of *complementarity*.

The Swedish Religious Education model is not without deficiencies but could nevertheless be inspiring for the way Europe deals with (Islamic) Religious Education. Rather than thinking in terms of denominational versus non-denominational, policymakers could also opt for a model where all students learn about religions and secular worldviews, while optional classes into a particular religion/worldview could be organized on request. If organized in a critical and nuanced way, both types of education will lead to increasing religious literacy, to personal identity formation (*Bildung*), and to future responsible citizens in an increasingly secularized and pluralized world.

Photo: USCIA.org

About the appointment of the new EU Special Envoy on freedom of religion or belief

What Christos Stylianides should know as he takes the post of the Special Envoy on religion or belief outside European Union?

By Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab

FORBES (16.05.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3wck2uw> - On May 5, 2021, the European Commission appointed Christos Stylianides as Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside European Union (EU Special Envoy on FoRB). Christos Stylianides has significant crisis management background, having served as the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management between 2014 and 2019 and as the European Union’s Ebola Coordinator. As we have seen over the years, in

many cases, dealing with violations on grounds of religion or belief outside European Union will mean dealing with crisis scenarios.

According to the online announcement, “[EU Special Envoy on FoRB] The Special Envoy will establish a dialogue with national authorities and other stakeholders in countries suffering from discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. He will support for intercultural and interreligious dialogue processes, including encouraging dialogue between representatives of different faiths and the setting up of joint initiatives. He will put in place measures to target de-radicalisation and prevention of extremism on grounds of religion or belief in third countries. In cooperation with authorities from third countries, he will promote religious diversity and tolerance within educational programs and curricula.”

The mandate of the EU Special Envoy on FoRB is relatively new. It was established in a February 2016 [resolution](#) on Daesh atrocities with the first appointment made in May 2016. At that stage the mandate was for a year, with the possibility that it would be renewed. This was the first mandate of its kind. However, in recent years, it has become very clear that the mandate needs to be strengthened to maximize the impact of the office. Among others, the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance, in its [2017 report](#), called for refining the mandate. The report identified that, as it stood, “the formal position of the Special Envoy is weak. It is not a full-time activity and with limited resources.” Similar recommendations on strengthening the mandate were subsequently made by Mr Andrzej Grzyb, the Rapporteur for the Committee on Foreign Affairs, who in his [report](#) on the “EU Guidelines and the mandate of the EU Special Envoy on the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU” recommended for the mandate to be extended to periods of a few years rather than for one year and renewed on a yearly basis. These recommendations have not been adopted yet.

The post of the EU Special Envoy on FoRB has remained empty for almost two years. The appointment of Christos Stylianides is a welcome sign that the European Commission continues to recognize the importance of engaging on the topic of freedom of religion or belief internationally.

What should Christos Stylianides expect as he takes the post? Not boredom, that’s for sure. A brief glance at the most egregious atrocities, many of which meet the legal definitions of genocide or crimes against humanity, confirms that there are several situations requiring urgent attention.

While we may not hear much about Daesh at the moment, there are still over [10,000](#) active members in Syria and Iraq. Daesh fighters have been using the pandemic to consolidate and so pose a renewed threat to religious communities, such as Yazidis and Christians. Furthermore, the communities once targeted for annihilation by Daesh continue to be in urgent need of assistance, let alone of psychological support. Those communities remain without justice.

In Myanmar, while international focus is on the coup, Rohingya Muslims, once targeted by the Burmese military, face [renewed threat](#) - their perpetrator now rules the country. Despite consideration by the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, the atrocities against the Rohingyas are far from resolved. Similarly, other religious minorities in Myanmar face dire situations that continue to be overshadowed by the bigger picture.

In China, Uyghurs are subject to atrocities which [legal experts](#) determine meet the legal definition of genocide. Thousands of [Uyghurs](#) are detained, forcibly indoctrinated and subjected to torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, rape and sexual violence, forced

abortions, forced sterilizations, removal of children to another group, and much more. Beijing [denies](#) the atrocities.

In Nigeria, [Boko Haram](#) and Fulani militia tore the country apart killing anyone who opposes their destructive ideology, both Christians and moderate Muslims.

In North Korea, being a [Christian](#) is the equivalent of a death sentence.

In Ethiopia, Orthodox Christians have been targeted with [deadly attacks](#). Churches have been the scenes of massacres with hundreds of killed and mass-graves filled with bodies.

This is without even mentioning violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief other than international crimes discussed above, whether acts of violence based on religion or belief, acts of harassment, marginalization or discrimination.

While the EU Special Envoy on FoRB, Christos Stylianides, will have plenty to engage with, having Christos Stylianides with his significant experience of working on crisis management, will be an important skill that can make a difference.

Photo : European flags wave in front of the Berlaymont building - European Commission (EC) headquarter - in Brussels, Belgium, on January 14, 2019. (Photo credit: Michele Spatari/NurPhoto via Getty Images) NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

The EU and freedom of religion or belief at the 46th session of the Human Rights Council

HRWF (25.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3ISirpR> - On 24 March, the EU Delegation to the UN in Geneva issued a press release which summed up the activities of the EU on a number of issues at the 46th session of the Human Rights Council. About freedom of religion or belief, it said:

“Promoting respect and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief (FORB) remains a major priority for the European Union. It is a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality. We have therefore, as in previous years, introduced a resolution at the Human Rights Council to respect and protect this fundamental right. *“We are pleased that this resolution, as well as the resolution by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Combating Religious Intolerance, have both been adopted by consensus,”* notes EU Ambassador Stevens. This year’s thematic report of the UN Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed focused on countering Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred to eliminate discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief, to which the EU Delegation also organised a very timely debate.”

This virtual debate titled "Anti-Muslim hatred as an obstacle to freedom of religion or belief" was organized by the EU Delegation and Canada in close cooperation with Dr Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB.

Photo: genevaplac.ch
