



REPORT ON RACISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPEAN FRENCH SPEAKING COUNTRIES

APRIL 2015

ORIW (Organisation Racism Islamophobia Watch)

18 Rue du chemin de fer
67200 Strasbourg, France
Tel : + 33(0)3 88 84 49 30
E-mail : contact@oriw.org

Introduction

This report contains a few official data. In the first quarter of 2015 the rate of Islamophobic events in France reached a percentage of 500%, if we compare it with the same period of the last year. This worrying assessment was sent by the National Observatory against Islamophobia to the Prime Minister Manuel Valls, on the day before the presentation of the government's plan to fight against racism and anti-Semitism¹.

The organization Muslim Rights Belgium published on 23rd April their report on Islamophobia in Belgium in 2014: 696 reports of discrimination were made in the Francophone part.

Episodes of racism and Islamophobia

Paris, France – 2nd April

A man hit a veiled woman in a train station of RER A (Auber). Some travellers tried to help her by keeping him still until the police came. The scene was recorded with a smartphone².

Thiéfosse (Vosges), France – 3rd/4th April

A racist fire against a Muslim family and Nazi tags outraged the people from Thiéfosse, a village in the Vosges . The family's cars , parked outside their house , were burned in the night of April 3rd to 4th. Two swastika-shaped crosses were drawn on the housing wall. In fact , the father was hospitalized and only the housewife and her four children , aged from 20 months to 8 years old , were in the house. A neighbour saw the fire and woke them up.

Vandœuvre-lès-Nancy, France – 10/11 April

The Mosque from the urban area of Nancy became the target of hate tags during the night of 10th to 11th April.

(Photo credit: l'Est Républicain)



France – 22 April

A terrorist attack against some churches may have been stopped by the authorities. The author of this attack seems to be a young Algerian described as a 'radical Islamist'. This event made headline news in the French media during one week. Starting January, at least 3 possible terrorist attacks have been stopped by the authorities. But what gives food for thought is that all the suspects were released after they confessed.³

Pargny-sur-Saulx (Marne), France – 23 avril

A fire destroyed a Muslim prayer room, located in a house of 70m², in the village of Marne. According to Tarik Soufi, president of the Muslim Association of Pargny -sur-Saulx, "it is difficult to think it was an accident."

An investigation was opened by the prosecutor and entrusted to the research section of the police force.

¹ See the percentage of islamophobic events in the link below http://www.lecfcm.fr/?page_id=3523; *Presque autant d'actes antimusulmans recensés en 2015 que sur toute l'année 2014*, http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/01/23/multiplication-des-actes-antimusulmans-depuis-les-attentats-contre-charlie_4562004_3224.html.

² See the scene that took place at the train station in the video below, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gA_aP9I9gjs&oref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DgA_aP9I9gjs&has_verified=1.

³ See the article *Trois projets d'attentat contre des mosquées depuis janvier ... Les suspects tous libérés*, <http://www.desdome-setdesminarets.fr/2015/05/06/deux-eglises-en-vente-a-rouen-et-si-on-les-transformait-en-mosquees/>.

Mâcon (Saône-et-Loire), France – 25th/26th April

Two individuals attempted at night to set on fire the Turkish mosque in the city. The facts were recorded by the cameras of the mosque. A police investigation was opened.

Institutions, public and political speech

Montpellier, France – 10 April

The representative of the trade union *Force Ouvrière* (FO) in Tam - Transport of Montpellier area - requested the establishment of a special shuttle for the Roma to fight the whiff and a "possible infection" that bothers passengers and bus drivers of the line 9. The transport company rejected the idea, which has generated a lot of reaction by the organizations of human rights.

Nice, France – 26 April

The UMP deputy mayor of Nice, Christian Estrosi, said during an interview on France 3 that "Judeo-Christian civilization of which we are the heirs is threatened" by "the fifth columns" operating in France. Indeed, for Mr Estrosi, a "third world war" was declared by the *Islamofascism*, present nowadays in France, against "the Judeo-Christian civilization"⁴.

Islamophobia in mass media and culture

RTL, France – 7 April

Islam religion and Muslim French people have been attacked again by Eric Zemmour, during one of his participation on the radio station RTL. The writer and journalist, famous for its positions and friendships belonging to the extreme right wing, has sparked off a controversy on the will of the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF) to increase the number of mosques in France. Indeed, Zemmour affirmed that minority religions should conform to the predominant culture coming from Catholic religion⁵.

France5 – 10 April

Philippe Val, former director at Charlie Hebdo, during the broadcast conducted by Anne-Sophie Lapix stated that Islamophobia is a word invented on the purpose to avoid talking of the danger of radicalization in Islam⁶.

M6, France – 12 April

The TV program *Zone Interdite* broadcasted a report on the 'new ghettos' of 'sensitive' neighborhoods in France. Many viewers were stricken by the negative image passed through this report. In particular, the story of a family living in some suburbs and converted to Islam has been the cause of very racist reactions and stigmatization towards Islam, seen as a danger for French society.⁷

France – from 13th April on

After the official presentation of the new educational programs that will be in effect from 2016, the polemic has inflamed around the history curricula. Indeed, in the new programs, some subject such as the study of Islam, the slave trade, etc. are identified as obligatory, meanwhile others such as the wars of religion and the Enlightenment will be chosen by the teachers as elective⁸.

For example, the essayist and novelist Pascal Bruckner has said in this regard "the choice of privileging the teaching of Islam history instead of the Enlightenment or medieval Christianity is astonishing. In my view, this is not just an arbitrary choice but something ideological. There is here an open willingness

⁴ See the interview with Mr Estrosi on France 3, http://www.francetvinfo.fr/faits-divers/terrorisme/attentat-dejoue-a-paris/video-estrosi-denonce-des-cinquiemes-colonnes-islamistes-en-france_887303.html.

⁵ See the video of Mr Zemmour's participation on RTL.fr, 7th April 2015, <http://www.rtl.fr/actu/societe-faits-divers/un-musulman-est-il-forcement-pieux-interroge-eric-zemmour-7777296563>.

⁶ See the video Mr Val's participation on France5 at http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2m8cpk_philippe-val-islamophobie-c-est-un-mot-pour-eviter-de-parler-du-danger-de-radicalisation-au-sein-de_news?start=6.

⁷ See the whole report on M6 at <http://www.6play.fr/m6/zone-interdite/11476358-quartiers-sensibles-le-vrai-visage-des-nouveaux-ghettos#/m6/zone-interdite/11476358-quartiers-sensibles-le-vrai-visage-des-nouveaux-ghettos>.

⁸ For a better overview see <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid88073/mieux-apprendre-pour-mieux-reussir-les-points-cles-college-2016.html>.

to respect Islam and a desire to please these newcomers by removing everything which may hurt them"⁹. Even more extremist Mr Sebastien Huyghe's opinion, UMP spokesman, who has demanded Hollande to stop this heresy which may degenerate in the substitution of history teachers by professors of history of civilization and sustainable development¹⁰.

But these are only some of the comments which were addressed to National Education in defense of nationalist and secular pride against the choice of the new programs of history in secondary schools.¹¹

Charleville Mézieres (Ardennes), France – 29th April

A secondary school student aged 15, Sarah K., was refused and expelled by her institute because of her skirt, judged being too long. The director of the school, Ms Maryse Dubois, affirms that the girl's outfit shows off her religious belief and that it would represent an infraction to the law on secularism at school. The episode is dividing both French¹² and international¹³ public opinion.

Some days before the publication of the facts, ORIW had already received the phone call from a mother of the same town, concerned about the behaviour of the director of the school towards her daughter because of her "too long" skirts.¹⁴

The law of 2004 on the prohibition of religious signs in public schools is silent in regards to attire.

Good News

Paris, France – 9th April

The CNCDH (the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights) has officialised the use of the word *Islamophobia* in the summary of its 2014 report. Indeed, it reports that "in occasion of the 2013 report, the CNCDH had already adopted a definition of the phenomenon called *Islamophobia*" as "the appearance of a quasi-phobia, which means an intense fear of Islam and Muslims, generating a climate of anguish and hostility toward them".

Our actions and progresses

Strasbourg, France – 6th/12th April

One member from our staff has participated to the study session "(Re)Act for equal opportunities online and offline" at the CoE Youth Center in Strasbourg, organized by the ONG UNITED¹⁵, a network of European organizations and associations fighting against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees¹⁶.

⁹ Alexandre Devecchio, Pascal Bruckner : *les nouveaux programmes d'histoire ou l'effacement de la France*, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/2015/04/25/31003-20150425ARTFIG00143-pascal-bruckner-les-nouveaux-programmes-d-histoire-ou-l-effacement-de-la-france.php>.

¹⁰ See *Réforme du collège: l'UMP en appelle à Hollande "pour faire cesser cette hérésie"*, <http://www.vousnousils.fr/2015/04/27/reforme-du-college-lump-en-appelle-a-hollande-pour-faire-cesser-cette-heresie-567779>.

¹¹ Pour autres opinions et critiques, <http://blogs.rue89.nouvelobs.com/journal.histoire/2015/04/29/nouveaux-programmes-d-histoire-le-betisier-des-opposants-234515>.

¹² The *hashtag #JePorteMaJupeCommeJeVeux* has been created and diffused on social networks in order to denounce the episode as racist and islamophobic.

¹³ Alissa J. Rubin, *French School Deems Teenager's Skirt an Illegal Display of Religion*, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/30/world/europe/french-school-teenagers-skirt-illegal-display-religion.html?_r=0.

¹⁴ See ORIW press release on 23rd April at <http://www.oriw.org/communique-oriw-charleville/>.

¹⁵ <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/>

¹⁶ <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/conferences/conference-archive/react-for-equal-opportunities/>.