



## **FACULTY OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES OF BRUSSELS**

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In a climate of xenophobia, intolerance and despair, in societies where unity and solidarity are values that seem to become more and more meaningless, we want and try to answer the fears of vulnerable people or ethnic, cultural and religious minorities by using a specific teaching of Islam that is scientific as well as rational.

The first step in fighting all different forms of xenophobia, which threaten our societies, is to understand the reasons that cause irrational fear and suspicion. Indeed, we think that the struggle against xenophobia, and notably islamophobia, requires a better understanding of Islam. Even if the root of the problem deals with Human Rights and equality of every citizen, it is quite natural to perceive particular attacks against Muslims like an attack against Islam as a religion. For example, during the "Eid-al'adha" celebration, the decision of the city of Mechelen to introduce an extra tax of approximately 15 Euros per each sacrificed sheep, accentuated this kind of bad perception from our Muslim fellow citizens.

In Belgium, the managing of the secular affairs of Islam as a recognised religion officially started in 1974. This allows our country to be an example of good practices for many European countries. However, the current challenge is to include the Muslim community in every sphere of the society. That would be possible only if we create an atmosphere of trust by struggling against suspicion linked to the misinformation conveyed about Islam. The Belgian State is in charge of organising the teaching of Islam and, obviously, it requires a better training of Imams, teachers and religious assistants. As in every other field, the first condition is to have a real and solid expertise and the second condition is that experts must gain the trust of Muslims. If these two conditions are not fulfilled, we are just losing time and money.

The Faculty of Islamic Sciences of Brussels (FISB) aims to answer those two questions in a professional manner. It is a reliable partner for the Belgian State in order to meet the current needs in the field of Islamic teaching while preserving the interests of our country regarding social cohesion matters. We would have loved to find some potential contacts more easily in our country. However, we hope that this OSCE platform will enable us to launch a deeper and healthier cooperation.

**Here are our recommendations for this session:**

We encourage the Ministerial Council of the OSCE to adopt a global and deep decision in order to prevent racial discrimination, xenophobia and hatred against Muslims, by promoting educational initiatives and raising public awareness.

We encourage the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to support the Swiss presidency in an effort to conceive and implement “islamophobia prevention projects”, particularly by promoting educational initiatives and raising public awareness in the media as well as in political discourse.

We suggest that the ODIHR create tools to support the efforts of media experts in developing and implementing codes of conduct, mechanisms of self-regulations and other adequate measures that ensure equal representation of people and groups in the society. The ODIHR should commit itself in an open dialogue with civil society and political figures. This dialogue will pave the way for encouraging responsibility and ethics in public discourse. Eventually, it will help to take concrete measures by implementing codes of behaviour that will allow treating the widespread and growing use of anti-Islamic attacks in the public sphere. Educational Institutions, like the BFIS, could be effective partners in this matter.

We call out the Belgian State to consider Institutions specialised in the teaching of Islam as trusted partners for managing the Islamic religion in Belgium, with full transparency and taking into account the principles and values of our Kingdom. The FISB is ready to take part in all these kinds of cooperation.

In conclusion, we want to congratulate the ODIHR for having written a guide that helps teachers and educators address intolerance against Muslims. This guide will serve as a model in order to fight racism and xenophobia and we will use it within our educational system. The FISB is preparing a module that will draw inspiration from this guide.