A community rediscovered

The impact of counter-radicalization on the multiculturalist accommodation of Islam in Belgium

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Abstract

This thesis wants to analyze the impact of the counter-radicalization policies and political debates on the multiculturalist accommodation of Islam in Belgium. Recent terrorist events have put pressure on the position of Islam in Western societies. On the same time, Muslims are called upon to cooperate with state authorities to combat violent extremism. I answer my research question by analyzing how the Muslim community is framed and co-opted in governmental policies and parliamentary debates regarding counter-radicalization on the federal, Flemish and Francophone in Belgium.

I argue that counter-radicalization impacts the multiculturalist accommodation of Islam in Belgium in a conditional, contingent and paradoxical way. A renewed rapprochement between state authorities and the Muslim community did take place, although the actual incorporation of Islam was met with several constraining conditions which are blurring the boundaries of the principle of church-state separation. On the other hand, the differences in counter-radicalization approaches in Flanders and Francophone Belgium reveal a high level of contingency regarding the impact of these approaches on the multiculturalist approaches to Islam. This adds to the increased understanding about the often paradoxical nature of the Belgian approach to cultural and religious diversity.

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Introduction

If we are to believe certain media and political discourses, the positon of Islam in Western Europe is under threat. Recent terrorist attacks and the terrorist threat stemming from Islamist organizations or radicalized individuals have sparked questions about the place for religion and Islam in society. This debate has recently also figured high on the political agenda in Belgium. Following tragic terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 and Brussels in 2016, policy makers on different levels understood that something should be done to prevent further radicalization. For answers and solutions, politicians looked increasingly in the direction of the same community some described as 'suspect'. The Muslim community is indeed engaged in increasing ways in the counter-radicalization plans and measures by different governments in Belgium.

This poses questions about the impact of counter-radicalization on the position of Islam in Belgium. During the past decades, states have devised a mechanism of diversity management under the banner of multiculturalism. The active recognition and incorporation of cultural and religious diversity was understood as a viable way to create inclusive and open societies. The recent terrorist menace has however put pressure on the multiculturalist accommodation of religious diversity.

The Belgian case is interesting in this regard, as the country consists of two very distinct parts which each have a different approach to multiculturalism and diversity. While the Flemish approach can be described as more multiculturalist, the Francophone way of dealing with cultural and religious diversity is defined as more 'color-blind' assimilationist. One scope of this thesis is to find out whether these discrepancies also reflect in the different approaches to Islam in the context of the counter-radicalization policies.

My core research question is how and whether counter-radicalization policies and the political debates on the prevention of violent radicalism in the federal, Flemish and Francophone states have an impact on the multiculturalist accommodation of Islam in Belgium. If one considers the recent political discourse and some scholarly debates on multiculturalism, one is ought to believe that the issue of radicalization has a disruptive impact on the positon and accommodation of religious diversity with regard to Islam. On the other hand, another school of though has recently given a very different interpretation, arguing that multiculturalism might actually be used as a tool to prevent further radicalization. These observations will be scrutinized using the Belgium as a case.

This thesis is build up the following way. Fist I will touch upon the most relevant literature in the field of multiculturalism, Islam and radicalism. I will provide theoretical background on these issues with the aim of clarifying certain concepts and constructing a hypothetical background for the actual research. I also touch briefly on the used methodology. In the following chapter, I will analyze the specific Belgian approach to multiculturalism and the accommodation of Islam. In the subsequent chapters, I analyze and discuss the different counter-radicalization policies put in place by the different governments and parliaments under scrutiny. In the concluding chapter I answer the question to what extent counter-radicalization has or had an impact on the multiculturalist accommodation of Islam in Belgium.

Multiculturalism, radicalism and Islam

Before assessing the impact of counter-radicalization policies on multiculturalism, it is important to give a concise definition of the concept of multiculturalism. I understand the term as a set of policies and discourses which accommodate and frame ethno-cultural and religious diversity of certain minorities in a given society. Ever since the 1970s, several Western states came to understand that they need to accommodate certain indigenous and migrant communities present on their territory. Groups where granted specific rights and privileges which enabled them to retain some of their distinct religious and cultural practices in the majority or host society. States actively recognized these differences and often gave them an institutional grounding by setting up minority representative bodies.[1]

The element of state recognition and representation is central to my understanding of multiculturalism and the focus of this thesis. The recognition of group cultures and religions is, as Modood argues, what sets multiculturalism apart from mere integration policies, which only recognizes individual differences.[2] Recognizing minorities and their distinct cultural and

[1] Kymlicka, Will. 1995. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Clarendon Press.
[2] Modood, Tariq. 2013. *Multiculturalism*. John Wiley & Sons.

religious identities naturally should entail some form of state incorporation. Therefore, recognition must lead to a representation of the minority identity in public space.[3]

It is important to note that I do not understand multiculturalism as a coherent 'multiculturalist regime' which can be set against other policy regimes of accommodating or handling diversity. Authors have long noted that no country has in place a clear-cut framework stemming from one political or ideological paradigm. Rather, states all have their own patchwork of different policies which deal with integration and diversity.[4] Normative schemes are always confronted with national and local specificities which obstruct a full implementation of these schemes. The concept of 'paradigmatic pragmatism' by Schiller is of interest in this regard. She contends that policy makers on the local level constantly negotiate between top-down decided policy paradigms and local necessities, creating a king of pragmatic approach to paradigmatic integration schemes.[5]

Multiculturalism and and the recognition of religious diversity

Let me now turn to the relation between multiculturalism and religious diversity, focusing on the case of Islam. Interestingly, within the field of multiculturalism, the religious dimension of international migration and integration has long been neglected. According to Koenig, it is only recently that scholars and policy makers have acknowledged the religious aspect of migrant identities and integration.[6] This caused Kymlicka to assert that the issue of accommodating

[3] Vertovec, Steven, and Susanne Wessendorf. 2010. *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*. Routledge.

[4] Vertovec, Steven, and Susanne Wessendorf. 2010.

[5] Schiller, Maria. 2015. "Paradigmatic Pragmatism and the Politics of Diversity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (7): 1120–36.

[6] Koenig, Matthias. 2015. "Incorporating Muslim Migrants in Western Nation States—A Comparison of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany." In *After Integration: Islam, Conviviality and Contentious Politics in Europe*, edited by Marian Burchardt and Ines Michalowski. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.

religious diversity – and Islam in particular – is one of the most important questions to be investigated in the field of multiculturalism studies today.[7]

This debate about the relation of religion and multiculturalism has has centered around two questions: the controversy over the position of religion in modern days' European secular societies and the question whether migrant religious minorities actually deserve multicultural recognition or not. Both are strongly interconnected and I will discuss them in detail here.

In his seminal work on multicultural citizenship, Kymlicka largely builds up his plea for multicultural recognition for national minorities and indigenous groups around the argument of their suffered historic discrimination and deprivation caused by the majority society. In a similar vein, 'voluntary' immigrants posit a weaker claim to cultural protection as they chose to leave their 'cultural homeland' behind.[8] Modood has fiercely criticized Kymlicka's model of multiculturalism for its anti-immigrant bias and for disregarding religion. Modood argues for a scheme of multiculturalism which recognizes minority cultures not for their historic position in a given society, but for the real and actual discrimination that they encounter in this society on the basis of their distinct cultural or religious identity. Thus rather than making up for historic wrongdoings, multiculturalism should combat current racial and religious discrimination (e.g. Islamophobia), so that "a negative difference is turned into a positive difference".[9]

This view is contested in the literature. Many authors defy an approach which would automatically endow "new" (that is: not autochthon) minorities with specific multicultural rights. For Levy for instance, multiculturalism cannot be considered a pre-given right to every minority. He argues for a mode of multiculturalism which deals with cultural and religious

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[7] Kymlicka, Will. 2015. "The Essentialist Critique of Multiculturalism: Theory, Policies and Ethos." In *Multiculturalism Rethought: Interpretations, Dilemmas and New Directions*, edited by Varun Uberoi and Tariq Modood, 209–49. Edinburgh University Press.
[8] Kymlicka, Will. 1995.
[9] Modood, Tariq. 2013.

diversity in a pragmatic and contingent way. States can grant multicultural rights to some minorities in some cases, but not in a reactive rather than proactive way.[10] In a similar vein, Joppke disfavors the idea that the state should actively recognize religious diversity. This should rather be a private matter.[11]

Although Levy and Joppke do not specifically target religious minorities in their assertions, other authors clearly have Islam in mind when making their argument. This is where the argument of secularism comes up. Many prominent scholars have pointed to the problematic relation between Islam and Western secularism. In his account of multiculturalism, Taylor specifically refers to Islam to exclude it from his politics of recognition, because "for mainstream Islam, there is no question of separating politics and religion".[12] For some authors, Islam is not just incompatible with secularism but with whole Western modernity. In his famous work on the clash of civilizations, Huntington sees the differentiated recognition of Islam as an assault to "the shared communal values and solidarity necessary for cohesion and integration".[13]

This call for excluding Islam from the multiculturalist regime was met with fierce criticism. Kymlicka asserts that the debate about secularism is misleading, as all countries perform some kind of accommodation and recognition to religious beliefs. International conventions on human rights and religious freedom have long pushed states to adopt benevolent or at least non-discriminatory policies to accommodate religious diversity. Kymlicka further argues that proponents for a rigid separation of church and state neglect the inconsistent way in which such claims are often put forward. He points to the fact that "the faith-based claims of immigrants

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[10] Levy, Jacob T. 2000. *The Multiculturalism of Fear*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
[11] Joppke, Christian. 2004. "The Retreat of Multiculturalism in the Liberal State: Theory and Policy." *The British Journal of Sociology* 55 (2): 237–57.
[12] Taylor, Charles, and Amy Gutmann. 1992. *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition": An Essay*. Princeton University Press.
[13] Huntington, Samuel P. 1997. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Penguin Books India.

are not accorded the same respect and attention as those older, more established religious groups".[14]

With this statement, Kymlicka partly confronts the anti-migrant bias critique ousted by Modood. His findings about the present day accommodation of religious diversity is echoed by Habermas, who contends that we have arrived in an era of 'postsecularism'. According to the German thinker, the secularization thesis positing the disappearance of religion in modern day society, has lost its plausibility. He argues that liberal states and secular citizens no longer "expect all citizens to justify their political positions independently of their religious convictions or worldviews," and therefore calls for mutual understanding between religious and secularist people.[15]

Koenig's research on the incorporation of Muslim migrants in the UK, France and Germany actually provides empirical evidence for the postsecularist these of Habermas. He finds that state mechanisms for the recognition of religious diversity are increasingly categorized by "the inclusion of religion as a legitimate category of identity in the public sphere and by successive symbolic boundary shifts between the religious and the secular." The author concludes that the nation as we know it, is considerably less secular and certainly less neutral than is often assumed.[16]

Many authors have indeed argued that the debate about secularism is often essentially about the (contested) position of Islam within Western societies, thereby implicitly or explicitly criticizing Huntington's notorious these about a presumed clash of civilization between a Christian and Islamic sphere. In their investigation about the accommodation of Islam in

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[14] Kymlicka, Will. 2009. "The Governance of Religious Diversity: The Old and the New." In *International Migration and the Governance of Religious Diversity*, edited by Paul Bramadat and Matthias Koenig, 323–34. School of Policy Studies, Queen's University.
[15] Habermas, Jürgen. 2008. "Notes on a Post-Secular Society." *Signandsight.com / Let's Talk European*. June 18.
[16] Koenig, Matthias. 2015.

Flanders, Belgium, Bracke and Fadil found that the debates often employed secularism "as a doctrine". By using an a-historic and strict reading of secularism, the debate regards Islam as incompatible with Western modernity and thereby leaves no room for pluralist alternatives.[17] Employing such strict secularist narrative goes against the empirical findings of Bader, who stresses that the implementation of secularism is always strongly influenced by contextual and historical factors.[18]

Apart from criticism to the strict secularist these, many authors have made claims as to way states do have to actively interfere with recognizing religious minorities. One of the strongest proponents of an active state-pluralism regarding religious diversity is Modood. He stresses that claims made by Muslims to liberal states are in no way different from other claims of cultural diversity.[19] In his recent work, he argues for a reconceptualization of secularism, which would lead state institutions to open up for religious diversity in a pragmatic way. Given the highly diverging forms of secularism in different countries, according to the author contemporary institutional arrangements to church-state relations should be pluralized, with a greater role for civil society.[20]

Authors often point to the specific needs as to why Europe should actively recognize and incorporate Islam in its state affairs. According to Alexander, incorporating its tens of millions of Muslim citizens is a necessity for Europe if it wants to preserve its democratic values in todays globalizing world. He argues that allowing persons but not their qualities (that is: cultural

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[17] Bracke, Sarah, and Nadia Fadil. 2009. "Tussen Dogma En Realiteit. Secularisme, Multiculturalisme En Nationalisme in Vlaanderen (Between Dogma and Reality. Secularism, Multiculturalism and Nationalism in Flanders)." In *Een Leeuw in Een Kooi. De Grenzen van Het Multiculturele Vlaanderen (A Lion in a Cage. The Boundaries of Multiculturalism in Flanders)*, edited by Karel Arnaut, Bambi Ceuppens, Sarah De Mul, and Meryem Kanmaz, 93–111. Antwerpen: Meulenhoff/Manteau.
[18] Bader, Veit-Michael. 2007.
[19] Modood, Tariq. 2000. "Anti-essentialism, multiculturalism, and the 'recognition' of religious groups." In *Citizenship in diverse societies*, edited by Will Kymlicka & Wayne Norman, 175– 195. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[20] Modood, Tariq. 2013.

and religious identities) to be incorporated, runs the danger of reinforcing core group identities among majority and minority groups.[21] Statham, Koopmans, Giugni and Passy pointed to the fact that failing to recognize Islam and incorporate it into political institutions may lead to grievances which will eventually turn future generations against Western societies.[22]

Institutionalization of Islam

Interestingly enough, despite controversies between proponents and opponents of multiculturalist rights for Islam, empirical research shows that Western states have indeed accommodated their Muslim communities in different ways.[23] Much against the presumed backlash against multiculturalism and the appeal for strict secularism, most Western European countries today have enacted some kind of multicultural recognition for minority religions. Burchardt and Michalowski found that in almost all Western European countries religious rights for Muslims saw a stark rise in the period from 1980 to 2008.[24]

But what kind of religious rights are we speaking about? Vertovec and Wessendorf identify several key areas in which state-arrangements are made to accommodate cultural and religious diversity: public recognition, education, social services, public materials (e.g. state-sponsored information), law, religious accommodation, food and media.[25] Specifically, with regard to the Muslim minority, we can think of Muslim consultative bodies, state-funded Islamic schools of religious classes, the rights to wear a headscarf or conduct ritual animal slaughtering, state

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[21] Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2013. "Struggling over the Mode of Incorporation: Backlash against Multiculturalism in Europe." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 (4): 531–56.

[22] Statham, Paul, Ruud Koopmans, Marco Giugni, and Florence Passy. 2005. "Resilient or Adaptable Islam? Multiculturalism, Religion and Migrants' Claims-Making for Group Demands in Britain, the Netherlands and France." *Ethnicities* 5 (4): 427–59.

[23] Kymlicka, Will. 2009; Koenig, Matthias. 2015.

[24] Burchardt, Marian, and Ines Michalowski. 2015. "Islam in Europe: Cross-National Differences in Accommodation and Explanations." In *After Integration: Islam, Conviviality and Contentious Politics in Europe*, 105–28. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.

[25] Vertovec, Steven, and Susanne Wessendorf. 2010.

support for houses of worship and Islamic burial sites, Islamic religious programs in public broadcasting, Muslim chaplains in prisons or the military.[26]

For the purpose of my research I will mainly focus on the public recognition and representation of Islam. This mainly entails the institutionalization of representative bodies, although I will also touch upon religious accommodation in education, religious practices, social services and media.

The institutionalization of Islam in Europe has a rather difficult history. In his book about the emancipation of Europe's Muslims, Laurence notes that despite the long history of Islamic presence in modern day Europe, the actual institutionalization of the religion and its representatives into state affairs is a rather recent phenomenon. Until at least the 1990s, Islam was largely neglected by state authorities and left in the hands of foreign institutions. Only at the end of the 20th century came the understanding that the growing Muslim population in Europe was here to stay and that they should be dealt with accordingly. States started to incorporate representatives from their Muslim communities in the state system through the appointment of Islam Councils. This "domestication" of Islam, as Laurence calls it, was mainly induced by the idea of integration and the reassertion of state sovereignty over the established transnational Muslim networks which held great influence in domestic religious communities throughout Europe. This institutional recognition of Islam was thus a product of the reaffirmation of state control over this new community.[27]

The governance of religious diversity in the West can be roughly divided in two approaches. First is the 'secularist' model, which is can be found in the US and partly in France. In this model, the state does not actively interfere with the representation and institutionalization of religious communities, assuming a strict separation between state and religion. The

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[26] Burchardt, Marian, and Ines Michalowski. 2015.
[27] Laurence, Jonathan. 2012. *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims: The State's Role in Minority Integration*. Princeton University Press.

'institutional pluralist' or 'corporatist' model can be found in continental Europe, where states more actively engage with religious communities to co-opt and incorporate them in state institutions.[28]

Some authors point to the pre-existing church-state relations when explaining the national approach to institutionalizing Islam. This is for instance how Bader explains the 'church' like, unitary approach to Muslim representation in Belgium, which is a top-down state-project closely mirroring the older church-state relations.[29] Recent empirical research on the institutionalization regimes of Islamic organizations in Belgium, France, the UK and Germany however found objects this assertion. Pre-existing church-state relations have far less impact on the nature of institutionalization of Islam in Europe. All four countries followed similar pathways to the creation of official Muslim councils. Rather than prior religious arrangements, transcendental factors like the acknowledgement of Islam, security and integration policy seem to play a far bigger role in structuring these constellations.[30]

An underlying argument for this new mode of institutionalization of Islam is the attempt to 'domesticate' Islam in the national community.[31] Muslim representative bodies are not recognized for their equal right to state-incorporation in line with older religious communities, but in a state-effort to integrate and control this new community. Joppke criticizes such an act of recognition for being unilateral and leaving in place the underlying power structures between the majority and minority.[32] Modood offers a normative critique to such a domestication

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[28] Bader, Veit. 2007. *Secularism Or Democracy?: Associational Governance of Religious Diversity*. Amsterdam University Press; Kymlicka, Will. 2009.

[29] Bader, Veit. 2009. "Governance of Religious Diversity: Research Problems and Policy Problems." In *International Migration and the Governance of Religious Diversity*, edited by Matthias Koenig and Paul Bramadat, 43–72. School of Policy Studies, Queen's University.

[30] Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013. "Church–State Regimes and Their Impact on the Institutionalization of Islamic Organizations in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33 (1): 61–76.

[31] Satham, Paul, Ruud Koopmans, Marco Giugni, and Florence Passy. 2005.

[32] Joppke, Christian. 2004.

process, which lacks sufficient legitimacy. Rather than endowing representative powers onto a selected religious leadership, Modood proposes an institutionalization of Muslim communities through "civic society assertiveness and the recognition of the difference within these communities".[33]

Although Laurence acknowledges this issue of legitimacy, he contends that the state-recognition of a Muslim leadership has the merit of de-problematizing Islam in public policy and political debates. By encouraging the development of Islam "in the light of day," Muslim communities can gain more legitimacy for the political claims they produce themselves.[34] The issue of domestication and legitimacy of Muslim representatives will be a central theme in this research.

Does multiculturalism work?

Regardless of which historic, normative or pragmatic observations have informed the incorporation of Islam in the multiculturalist regime, it is important to ask the question whether it succeeded in attaining the goals it has set itself. If we understand multiculturalism as a tool to accommodate, valorize and recognize religious and cultural diversity – as I do – it seems to have largely worked. Despite persistent Islamophobia and discrimination, Muslims in Europe have been granted increasingly more religious rights to profess their belief in freedom and without constrains.[35] Kymlicka points to empirical evidence that practices of recognition and accommodation of religious diversity have strengthened rather than obliterated religious freedom and democracy.[36] In some cases, states even promote group rights for Muslims which more liberal Muslims actually do not want.[37]

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[33] Modood, Tariq. 2013.
[34] Laurence, Jonathan. 2012.
[35] Burchardt, Marian, and Ines Michalowski. 2015.
[36] Kymlicka, Will. 2009.
[37] Statham, Paul, Ruud Koopmans, Marco Giugni, and Florence Passy. 2005.

Despite this optimism about the achievements of multiculturalism, the same empirical evidence points to the limits of such an approach. Muslim communities might be long established and their religious identity recognized in all Western European countries, very often they still face a considerable less favorable socio-economic position in comparison the the 'majority' society.[38] The lack of integration into the labor market and the weak upward social mobility indeed remain persistent problems for many Muslims in Western Europe. Some authors think multiculturalism itself is to blame for this. According to Joppke, multiculturalism fostered socio-economic marginalization and self-segregation of minority groups.[39] Hereby he was one of the first, but certainly not the last, to blame multiculturalism for many of the problems related to cultural and religious minorities in Europe today (for an overview of the critique on multiculturalism, see *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*[40]).

But is it correct to blame multiculturalism for the persistent underprivileged socio-economic position of Muslims in Europe? Kymlicka thinks it is not. As one of the most outspoken proponents of liberal multiculturalism, he finds it unjust that the concept is blamed for problems it has not meant to solve. Kymlicka's account of multiculturalism is one aimed at the equalization of ethno-cultural and religious identities and a broadening of citizenship to incorporate this diversity. He does not speak about socio-economic equalization as such.[41]

Moreover, empirical research suggests that multicultural policies have little effect on socio-economic integration of immigrant minorities.[42] Thus, rather than discrediting multiculturalism

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[38] Torrekens, Corinne, and Dirk Jacobs. 2016. "Muslims' Religiosity and Views on Religion in Six Western European Countries: Does National Context Matter?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42 (2): 325–40.

[39] Joppke, Christian. 2004.

[40] Vertovec, Steven, and Susanne Wessendorf. 2010.

[41] Kymlicka, Will. 1995.

[42] Koopmans, Ruud. 2013. "Multiculturalism and Immigration: A Contested Field in Cross-National Comparison." *Annual Review of Sociology* 39: 147–69.

for fostering socio-economic marginalization of Muslim communities in Western Europe, Kymlicka contends that a corporatist approach to Islam might just not be the most viable way to confront the challenge of integrating Muslim newcomers in European societies. Hereby he clearly differentiates between two distinct but closely related challenges: the accommodation of religious diversity and the integration of newcomers in the receiving society. As Kymlicka argues, it is important not to conflate them with each other. Endowing cultural rights onto religious communities might be just from a liberal democratic point of view, it might in the same way be unwishful in confronting the equally important challenge of integrating immigrants.[43]

Kymlicka's argument might seem shaky from the liberal democratic point of view, but it points to some of the complex and persistent problems the model of multiculturalism is confronted with today. It also refers to the broader debate in minority studies about the relation between recognition of difference and social inclusion.[44]

Rather than multiculturalism having a negative impact on socio-economic integration of migrant communities, it might just not be the most successful tool of tackling this issue. But it is clear that, especially in the heads of policy makers, the the issues of recognition and inclusion are often conflated and provide ample ground for criticizing multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism and violent radicalism

There is a Belgian saying which goes: 'bad luck never comes alone'. And indeed, understanding about the poor socio-economic integration of Muslims in Western European societies was paralleled with an event which would generate even more public outcry and consternation. Since the beginning of this century, Western Europe has witnessed a string of terrorist attacks

[43] Kymlicka, Will. 2009.
[44] Kymlicka, Will. 2010. "The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism? New Debates on Inclusion and Accommodation in Diverse Societies." *International Social Science Journal* 61 (199): 97–112.

on its territory. Despite the complex background and sources of these attacks, terrorism and fundamentalism became almost exclusively linked to one religion: Islam.[45] Mainstream media, politicians and even scholars were quick to adopt a discourse setting 'us' against the Muslim 'other'.[46]

The almost exclusive link of fundamentalism with Islam has been much criticized in scholarly literature. Bracke and Fadil find that even in social theory literature, the concept of fundamentalism is generically used in association with Islam and this association is reproduced constantly. According to the authors, fundamentalism works according to an 'othering logic', which sets apart 'fundamentalist (other)' from the 'pluralist/tolerant (self)'. This creates a new modality of Orientalism as it was conceptualized by Said.[47] Although this othering logic is not entirely new, the authors assert that it has become increasingly important in todays debates over the position of Islam within Western modern societies. This neo-Orientalism problematizes the compatibility of Islam with democracy and pluralism for its perceived 'privileged' association with fundamentalism.[48]

Evidently, these events had a severe impact on the normative and political power of multiculturalism as a preferred tool to manage cultural and religious diversity. The most often heard string of criticism went along following line: multiculturalism has failed to fully integrate Muslims in the socio-economic and socio-cultural structures of our mainstream society, fostering alienation and marginalization. These processes in term have created disgruntled young men who are fed up with Western society and pose a 'terrorist threat from within'.[49]

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[45] Bleich, Erik. 2009. "State Responses to 'Muslim' Violence: A Comparison of Six West European Countries." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 (iii): 361–79.
[46] Huntington, Samuel P. 1997.
[47] Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. 1st Vintage Books ed edition. New York: Vintage.
[48] Bracke, Sarah, and Nadia Fadil. 2008. "Islam and Secular Modernity under Western Eyes: A Genealogy of a Constitutive Relationship." Working Paper.
[49] Meer, Nasar, and Tariq Modood. 2009. "The Multicultural State We're In: Muslims, 'Multiculture' and the 'Civic Re-Balancing' of British Multiculturalism." *Political Studies* 57 (3): 473–97; Vertovec, Steven, and Susanne Wessendorf. 2010.

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Prominent politicians eagerly adopted such a narrative. During a conference on security, multiculturalism and terrorism in 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron was prone to point out that for too long we have tolerated segregated communities with counter-running values to ours, all "under the doctrine of multiculturalism".[50] According to him, and since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 indeed according to many prominent policy makers and media figures, multiculturalism has alienated certain (young) individuals from mainstream society, making them more susceptible to radical and extremist ideas.[51]

Although empirical research shows that multiculturalism policies very much stayed in place during the 2000s[52] and religious rights for Muslims even increased[53], it goes without saying that this process has put fierce pressure on Muslim communities. States tried in various ways to reassert their supervision and control over their Muslim communities. This created a 'securitization of Islam,' which can be linked almost exclusively to the growing attention for Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.[54]

Many authors note that this in term has a severe impact on the multicultural approach of accommodating religious and cultural diversity as described above. Kymlicka has indeed noted that the growing securitization of religious communities – and especially Islam – is one of the major challenges to the future of present day liberal multiculturalism.[55]

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[50] Cameron, David. 2011. "PM's Speech at Munich Security Conference." Cabinet Office, Prime Minister's Office. https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference.
[51] Vertovec, Steven, and Susanne Wessendorf. 2010.
[52] Banting, Keith, and Will Kymlicka. 2013. "Is There Really a Retreat from Multiculturalism Policies? New Evidence from the Multiculturalism Policy Index." *Comparative European Politics* 11 (5): 577–98.
[53] Burchardt, Marian, and Ines Michalowski. 2015.
[54] Fadil, Nadia, Farid El Asri, and Sarah Bracke. 2014. "Islam in Belgium. Mapping an Emerging Interdisciplinary Field of Study." In *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, edited by Jocelyne Cesari. Oxford University Press.
[55] Kymlicka, Will. 2015.

Multiculturalism and counter-radicalization

Interestingly, against this presumed retreat from multiculturalism, other authors have contended the possible benefits from a multiculturalist approach in combatting radicalization and homegrown terrorism. In his book on incorporation policies to religious diversity, Bader confront the essentialist critique which says that multicultural recognition and incorporation of diversity purifies cultural and religious identities, and thereby legitimizes ethno-religious terrorism. He argues that color-blind majoritarian integrationist approaches to religious diversity might actually have the opposite effect, namely generating more radical and potentially violent sentiments among minority populations. Policies which on the other hand grant meaningful autonomy and opportunities for own institutions to religions, give incentives to more 'moderate' strategies.[56]

In a similar vein, Laurence asserts that "the institutionalization and incorporation of Muslim representatives will foster the normalization of Muslims' participation in political life." Internal democratization in combination with a reaffirmation of the centrality of the nation-state might indeed strengthen religious moderates in stead of curbing them.[57] Along this line, Modood argues that multiculturalist policies succeed in keeping 'on-side' the Muslim communities. Blaming both these policies and the communities which they target for all wrongs would just achieve the opposite of what many counter-terrorism measures actually want to achieve.[58]

These observations have not gone unnoticed by policy makers. Indeed, despite the fierce backlash against multiculturalism for its alleged connection to fostering radicalism and homegrown terrorism, several authors have pointed out that policy makers have used these same multiculturalist mechanisms to actually prevent further radicalization.[59] Indeed, rather

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[56] Bader, Veit. 2007.
[57] Laurence, Jonathan. 2012.
[58] Modood, Tariq. 2013.
[59] Bader, Veit. 2007; Laurence, Jonathan. 2012; Modood, Tariq. 2013; Ragazzi, Francesco. 2014. "The Impact of Counter Terrorism and Counter Radicalization and the 'End' of

than an assimilationist or integrationist approach, a multiculturalist mode of integration persists, which according to Modood offers the possibility of achieving a more egalitarian, rather than top-down, multiculturalism.[60]

If multiculturalist policies are far from dead, can we then conclude that recent episodes of terrorism and subsequent counter-terrorism measures have proven beneficial for Muslim religious rights in Europe? Here we arrive at a central topic of this thesis. While it can indeed be argued that multiculturalist mechanisms have persisted and sometimes strengthened during recent events, they have done so in a specific way and under constrained circumstances. The employed multiculturalist tools might be similar, but the underlying policy goals have considerably changed. In liberal multiculturalism, recognition and institutionalization of religious diversity are used to achieve equal positioning within of different religious and cultural groups within a multicultural mode of citizenship.[61] Current policy makers employ the same corporatist model of multicultural recognition but for very different reasons, namely as a tool to hold oversight and control over its Muslim communities with the aim of preventing further radicalization.[62]

While the goal of counter-radicalization might be as justified as the achievement of multicultural citizenship within a liberal democratic setting, considerable problems arise with such an approach to multiculturalism. In this regard, the British case of the 2011 counter-terrorism Prevent Strategy is instructive. While it aimed at increasing community engagement and social cohesion in order to prevent further radicalization among Muslim youngsters, it actually alienated them further from the mainstream society. They have the effect of creating a

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Multiculturalism." In *Counter-Radicalisation: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Christopher Baker-Beall, Charlotte Heath-Kelly, and Lee Jarvis, 156–75. Routledge; Ragazzi, Francesco. 2016. "Suspect Community or Suspect Category? The Impact of Counter-Terrorism as 'policed Multiculturalism.'" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42 (5): 724–41.
[60] Modood, Tariq. 2013.
[61] Kymlicka, Will. 1995.
[62] Bader, Veit. 2007; Laurence, Jonathan. 2012.

'suspect community', marginalizing and stigmatizing Muslims rather than granting them equal footing in a multicultural citizenship.[63]

Pantazis and Pemberton define a 'suspect community' as "a sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being "problematic." Even though only a small minority is actually surveiled by the authorities for counter-terrorism purposes, the whole Muslim community is targeted by media, political and civil society discourses.[64] Ample research has shown that counter-radicalization measures might indeed alienate – especially young – Muslims from the mainstream society, as they perceive these measures as stigmatizing and a new form of discrimination. Thus such policies might actually sustain terrorism.[65]

Ragazzi elaborates on the suspect community these to conceptualize the term 'policed multiculturalism', essentially to define a mode of recognition and management of diversity from a security perspective. The author contends that the reproduction of distinct communities, "far from being an unintended consequence of modem forms of counter-terrorism, is located at the very core of its modus operandi." As a consequence, debates about pluralism and the accommodation of diversity are no longer subject of political debate, but cast in a language of security.[66]

Ragazzi further argues that such policed multiculturalism makes the boundaries between the trusted and the suspect an extremely fine line. "The 'trusted' Muslims of yesterday can become the 'suspects' of tomorrow and vice versa." The 'trusted' Muslims are expected to put their

[63] Awan, Imran. 2012. "'I Am a Muslim Not an Extremist': How the Prevent Strategy Has Constructed a 'Suspect' Community." *Politics & Policy* 40 (6): 1158–85.

[64] Pantazis, Christina, and Simon Pemberton. 2009. "From the 'Old' to the 'New' Suspect Community Examining the Impacts of Recent UK Counter-Terrorist Legislation." *British Journal of Criminology* 49 (5): 646–66.

[65] Choudhury, Tufyal, and Helen Fenwick. 2011. "The Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures on Muslim Communities." *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology* 25 (3): 151–81.

[66] Ragazzi, Francesco. 2014.

social capital as 'insiders' to good use and help counter-radicalization institutions in their efforts.[67]

The element of depoliticization will prove important in my study of the Belgian case. Indeed, where before there was a strong debate about how the state should handle the accommodation and institutionalization of the Muslim communities, the terrorist menace and the counter-radicalization measures have securitized and depoliticized this debate. Thus the current Muslim representatives are co-opted in the counter-terrorism effort without a debate about their legitimacy. Recognition of communities is no longer the product of multiculturalism or the right to be recognized as equal, but put into a frame of security and necessary collaboration to combat terrorism. According to Ragazzi, this opens up the old critique of multiculturalism, as were it a way to contribute to the political marginalization of minorities since they remain highly dependent of the benevolence of the recognizing government.[68]

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[67] Ragazzi, Francesco. 2016.
[68] Ragazzi, Francesco. 2016.

Methodology

For the purpose of this research I analyze the counter-radicalization approaches in Belgium on the federal (national) and regional level. Belgium has a complex system of federalism which combines territorial (Regions) and cultural (Communities) sub-state autonomy. Today, Belgium has three Communities: Dutch, French and German speaking, and three Regions: Flanders, Wallonia and the Region of Brussels-Capital. The Regions enjoy jurisdiction over 'space-bounded' matters (such as infrastructure, environment and transport), while the Communities have jurisdiction over 'person-related' matters (such as social policy, culture, education, integration and the use of language). The federal level retains jurisdiction over general matters as law and justice, foreign affairs and defense.[69]

The governments which are relevant for my thesis are the federal government and the Dutch and French speaking community governments. To make things more complex, Flanders decided to merge its regional and communal competences and now forms one 'Flemish government'. On the other hand, the French speaking community government decided to adopt the name 'Federation Wallonia-Brussels'.[70] What is more important to remember is that both sub-national governments are competent in the most relevant policy fields related to the preventive approach to radicalization. The federal government is competent in repressive policies.

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[69] Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013.

[70] Throughout this thesis I will sometimes use the designation 'Francophone' of 'French speaking' government or parliament or 'FWB', referring to the institutions of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels.

My main source are policy documents and parliamentary debates of the parliaments and governments of the federal state, Flanders and the Federation Wallonia Brussels. I start my analysis in 2014, with the appointment of the new Flemish and Francophone governments in July, and the appointment of a new federal government in October. All documents are accessed through the websites of the concerned parliaments: http://www.dekamer.be/ for the federal parliament, https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/ for the Flemish parliament and https://www.pfwb.be/ for the Francophone parliament. Federal documents were consulted in Dutch and French, Flemish documents were consulted in Dutch and English, Francophone documents were consulted in Dutch. All translations were my own.

Relevant documents and parliamentary sessions were selected manually. Where possible I used a search engine with the terms "ISLAM", "MOSLIM", "MUSULMAN", "IMAM", "EXECUTI", "RADICALIS", "MOSKEE" and "MOSQUE".

Since I will refer to specific political parties and ministers, following is an overview of the different governments, governing parties and politicians.

The federal government

	The governing parties	English translation	Political ideology	Language
MR	Movement Réformateur	Reformist Movement	Conservative-liberal	French
N-VA	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	New Flemish Alliance	Conservative-Flemish nationalism	Dutch
CD&V	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams	Christian-Democratic and Flemish	Christian-democracy	Dutch
Open VLD	Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten	Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats	Liberalism	Dutch

Relevant ministers	Competence	Affiliation	Language
Charles Michel	Prime minister	MR	French
Jan Jambon	Minister of interior affairs and safety	N-VA	Dutch
Koen Geens	Minister of justice	CD&V	Dutch
Theo Francken	Minister of asylum and migration	N-VA	Dutch

The Flemish government

	The governing parties	English translation	Political ideology
N-VA	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	New Flemish Alliance	Conservative-Flemish nationalism
CD&V	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams	Christian-Democratic and Flemish	Christian-democracy
Open VLD	Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten	Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats	Liberalism

Relevant ministers	Competence	Affiliation
Geert Bourgeois	Minister president	N-VA
Liesbeth Homans	Minister of public governance, civic integration and equal opportunities	N-VA
Hilde Crevits	Minister of education	CD&V
Jo Vandeurzen	Minister of welfare	CD&V

The Francophone government

	The governing parties	English translation	Political ideology
PS	Parti Socialiste	Socialist Party	Social democracy
cdH	Centre démocrate humaniste	Humanist Democratic Center	Christian-democracy

Relevant ministers	Competence	Affiliation
Ruddy Demotte	Minister president	PS
Jean-Claude Marcourt	Minister of higher education, research and media	PS
Joëlle Milquet (*)	Minister of education, culture and childhood	cdH

(*) Replaced in April 2016 by Marie-Martine Schyns (cdH)

Belgian multiculturalism

Before starting the actual policy analysis, it is vital to briefly sketch the context of Belgium and its approach to multiculturalism, religion and Islam. In recent years, diversity policies of federal and multi-national states have come under increased scholarly scrutiny (see most recently *Nationalism, Identity and the Governance of Diversity: Old Politics, New Arrival[71]*). The Belgian case has received considerable attention in this regard, most notably because of the different approaches to diversity management in its two most important sub-national entities: Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia.[72]

Policies towards cultural, linguistic and religious diversity have, since their devolution to the regional level in the 1990s, gone very different ways in Flanders and Wallonia.[73] Influenced by the Dutch example of group-differentiated multiculturalism, the Flemish government quickly adopted a policy of supporting migrant self-organizations. The Francophone and Walloon

[71] Barker, Fiona. 2015. *Nationalism, Identity and the Governance of Diversity: Old Politics, New Arrivals*. Palgrave Macmillan.

[72] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Dirk Jacobs. 2010. "Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Integration Policy in Belgium and Flanders." *Canadian Journal for Social Research* 3 (1): 29–40; Adam, Ilke, and Marco Martiniello. 2013. "Divergences et Convergences Des Politiques D'intégration Dans La Belgique Multinationale. Le Cas Des Parcours D'intégration Pour Les Immigrés." *Revue Européenne Des Migrations Internationales* 29 (2): 77–93.

[73] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Dirk Jacobs. 2010.

government by contrast has – in line with the French model of individualist republicanism – refused to recognize ethnic-cultural groups in its migrant policies.[74]

This discrepancy between the diversity approach in Flanders and Wallonia is coined in the literature as the 'Belgian cultural diversity policy paradox'. Whereas Flanders has faced considerably more electoral success of radical-right wing political parties than Wallonia, it still has more multicultural minority rights in place. By contrast, in Francophone Belgium, a more color-blind and radical secular approach to diversity is in place in a context of weak anti-immigrant politicization.[75] But authors also pointed out that this Dutch-French dichotomy does not fully explain the differences between the regional diversity policies in Belgium. Adam asserts that one also has to take into account the diverging levels of state intervention with regard to cultural integration, arguing that the Flemish approach can be described as more interventionist whereas the approach by the Walloon government is more characterized as 'laissez-faire'.[76]

An important contribution to the understanding of multiculturalist policies in the case of Belgium was made by Bousetta and Jacobs. They found that there is a considerable difference between the debates on multicultural issues and the actual multicultural policies implemented. They coin this specific approach the 'Belgian multicultural pragmatism'. This empirical difference between policies and discourses does not prevent the authors from acknowledging the potential disruptive power of negative discourses of multiculturalism on the actual policies,

[74] Jacobs, Dirk. 2001. "Immigrants in a Multinational Political Sphere: The Case of Brussels." In *Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities*, edited by A. Rogers and J. Tillie, 107–22. Aldershot: Ashgate.
[75] Adam, Ilke, and Corinne Torrekens. 2015. "Different Regional Approaches to Cultural diversity Interpreting the Belgian Cultural Diversity Policy Paradox." *Fédéralisme Régionalisme*, December.
[76] Adam, Ilke. 2013. "Immigrant Integration Policies of the Belgian Regions: Sub-State Nationalism and Policy Divergence after Devolution." *Regional & Federal Studies* 23 (5): 547–69.

given the current the pressure which the idea of multiculturalism has recently received in Europe.[77]

Even though the Flemish approach to cultural and religious diversity can indeed be described as more proactively multiculturalist, the overall term of multiculturalism has lost much of its appeal and is no longer used in public policy documents. Rather they opt for an 'intercultural' approach and a form of diversity management with an emphasis on civic integration. A compulsory civic integration program for non-EU newcomers is in place in Flanders since 2004. Talks are underway to establish a similar program in Wallonia. Despite such compulsory integrationist tendencies, authors contend that the Flemish approach remains partly multiculturalist.[78] On the other hand, discourses on multiculturalism do not always follow a well defined patterns or frame as it is conceptualized in the literature. This is exemplified by Adam and Deschouwer, who found that the Flemish government sees no contradiction in combining more multicultural and more assimilationist approaches to cultural diversity. They coin the term "inegalitarian multiculturalism" as most characteristic for the Flemish discourse on immigration and integration.[79]

Belgium and Islam

I now turn to the Belgian approach to religious diversity. According to Koenig, the accommodation of religion by a specific state has a lot to do with the particular power conflicts

[77] Bousetta, Hassan, and Dirk Jacobs. 2006. "Multiculturalism, Citizenship and Islam in Problematic Encounters in Belgium." In *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship: A European Approach. [Ed.] Tariq Modood, Anna Triandafyllidou and Ricard Zapata-Barrero*, 23–36. London & New York: Routledge.
[78] Bracke, Sarah, and Nadia Fadil. 2009. "Tussen Dogma En Realiteit. Secularisme, Multiculturalisme En Nationalisme in Vlaanderen (Between Dogma and Reality. Secularism, Multiculturalism and Nationalism in Flanders)." In *Een Leeuw in Een Kooi. De Grenzen van Het Multiculturele Vlaanderen (A Lion in a Cage. The Boundaries of Multiculturalism in Flanders)*, edited by Karel Arnaut, Bambi Ceuppens, Sarah De Mul, and Meryem Kanmaz, 93–111. Antwerpen: Meulenhoff/Manteau.
[79] Patrick Loobuyck & Dirk Jacobs, How to understand the peculiar public discourse on immigration and integration in Flanders?

between the state and religion, and the national historical and contextual features which impact state-church relations. He thereby acknowledges that the successful incorporation of Islam in Western societies has more to do with the societies themselves than with the Muslims themselves.[80]

From its inception in 1830, Belgium has opted for a 'mild separation' of state and church affairs and an active support of religious and philosophical pluralism. Loobuyck, Debeer and Meier give a good oversight of the rights and benefits granted to recognized religions by the different levels of government. It is the federal government which pays the wages and pensions of religious counsellors, ministers and chaplains. Provinces and local governments provide housing and are able to provide financial assistance to local religious communities. The regional authorities recognize local religious communities. They cover part of the patrimonial cost. Recognized religions also have a right to public broadcasting, to organize their own religious education in state schools and can benefit from favorable tax benefits. Each recognized religion furthermore needs a representative body as interlocutor with the authorities.[81]

Originally being a Roman-Catholic country, Belgium today recognizes six religions (Roman-Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, the Anglican Church, the Orthodox Church and Islam) and one non-confessional world view (humanistic freethinkers). Islam is officially recognized since 1974, but due to political reluctance and internal struggles within the Muslim representative body, much of the related legal provisions remained unapplied until 2007.[82] The Muslim community in Belgium predominantly originates from the Turkish and Moroccan labor-migration in the 1960s and 1970s. Although official data is available of the Muslim population in Belgium, its number is estimated at between 500.000 and 800.000, representing 5 to 8 percent of the 11 million people living in Belgium. Approximately 320.000 are from

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[80] Koenig, Matthias. 2015.
[81] Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013.
[82] Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013.

Moroccan background and 112.000 from Turkish background.[83] The largest share lives in Brussels, housing around 39% of all Belgian Muslims. Especially the Muslims from Turkish origin are well organized in local, national and transnational associations.[84]

The history of recognition and institutionalization of Islam in Belgium however is void with problems.[85] First of all, financial support for the different religions is not equally disturbed. Although legal provisions are in place since 1974, many have been implemented late and half-heartedly. Examples are the fact that public broadcasting of Muslim programs in Flanders only started in 2011, or that despite the establishment of Islamic religious education in public schools since 1978, school inspectors were only appointed in 2005. Before 2007, not one local mosque community was recognized and the government did not pay any imam.[86]

Muslim Executive of Belgium

Although there are many reasons to be found for this backlog, one important factor is the fact that a Council which ought to represent the Muslims in Belgium was established relatively late in the 1990s and that it never worked effectively.[87] A lot has been written already about the establishment of national Muslim Councils in different European countries. After an early period of neglect, from the 1990s on, Western European governments through the appointment of Islam Councils tried to assert their control and sovereignty over the transnational Muslim networks which had emerged in the previous decades.[88] In this sense, the initiative of the Belgian government to establish a Muslim Executive of Belgium (MEB) and its associated

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[83] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014. "Imams in Flanders: A Research Note." *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 25 (4): 471–87.

[84] Koutroubas, Theodoros, Ward Vloeberghs, and Zeynep Yanasmayan. 2009. "Political, Religious and Ethnic Radicalisation Among Muslims in Belgium." In *Ethno-Religious Conflict in Europe: Typologies of Radicalisation in Europe's Muslim Community*, edited by Michael Emerson, 51–80. Brussels, Belgium: Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS).

[85] Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013.

[86] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014.

[87] Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013.

[88] Laurence, Jonathan. 2012.

problems were in no way unique to the Belgian case. The formation of one representative body

of all Muslims ran counter to the different national and sub-religious interest groups and created

tensions between proponents of a 'European' Islam and those with strong connections to the

religious interpretations stemming from their homelands. In Belgium, the strong interference

of the government, internal tensions and a lack of competence among some of its members and

inter-federal differences made the formation of a stabile functioning Islam Council ever more

difficult.[89]

Today, the MEB is up and running again, after subsequent episodes of compromised

elections, corruption scandals and internal tensions. However, it would be unjust to blame the

internal working of the Executive for all these problems. Many authors have indeed pointed

their finger at the Belgian government, asking questions about the sincere and democratic

nature of their inclination to establish a Muslim consultative body. By interfering with the

elections of the MEB and urging for the creation of one body to represent such a decentralized

religion, many wondered whether the authorities were not violating the separation between

church and state.[90]

This element of control was also felt by Muslims themselves. In a recent exploratory survey

conducted among imams in Flanders, Loobuyck and Meier found that the element of trust in

the authorities was vital to achieve positive policy outcome. Government initiatives to finance

religious affairs and to officially recognize houses of worship were evaluated positively when

it comes to professionalization and stabilization of their activities. However, the policy of state

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[89] Kanmaz, Meryem, and Sami Zemni. 2008. "Moslims Als Inzet in Religieuze, Maatschappelijke En Veiligheidsdiscours': De Erkenning En Institutionalisering van de Islamitische Eredienst in België." (Muslims as leverage in religious, societal and security discourse: the recognition and institutionalization of the Islamic religion in Belgium) In *Islambeleving in de Lage Landen (Islam in the Low Countries)*, edited by Christiane Timmerman and Els Vanderwaeren, 109–56. Leuven/Apeldoorn: Acco.

[90] Kanmaz, Meryem, and Sami Zemni. 2008; Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013.

recognition was also met with suspicion, fearing that such government initiatives can lead to far-reaching state control. According to the authors, governments should take this ambivalent attitude into account when aiming for more cooperation with imams.[91]

Another controversy relates to the actual role and task of the MEB. Officially, it only performs as a dialogue partner of the authorities in all religious matters. They manage the state funds for the building or renovation of mosques, the payments of the wages of imams and Muslims chaplains and has an advising role in the curricula of Islam teaching in public education.[92] However, despite its exclusively political role, the boundaries between political and theological issues have been blurred sometimes within the Executive.[93] This has a lot to do with the diverging interests and interpretations given to the MEB by the Flemish and Walloon governments. While the French-speaking politicians see the Executive not as a religious but as a political organ, the Flemish parties have interpreted its scope more broadly. The latter have come to see it as a tool to further overall social integration of the Muslim minority. Thus rather than a mere interlocutor on religious affairs, the Executive is seen as a representative of the whole Muslim community which has a decisive – although not legally binding – voice in the integration and social inclusion debate.[94]

Interestingly however, this greater role attached to the MEB by Flemish politicians has not been fully reflected on the terrain. Indeed, the French speaking government has in recent years recognized more Muslim communities than Flanders. In 2012, 70 Muslim communities were officially recognized and 40 imams are being paid by the Belgian government. Only 24 of them are in Flanders. This despite the fact that of that half of all 310 mosques known to the MEB are

[91] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014.

[92] Zemni, Sami. 2006. "Islam between Jihadi Threats and Islamist Insecurities? Evidence from Belgium and Morocco." *Mediterranean Politics* 11 (ii): 231–53.

[93] Kanmaz, Meryem, and Sami Zemni. 2008.

[94] Zemni, Sami. 2006.

located in Flanders. Authors explain this by the more closed political field, the presence of a far-right political party and the higher standards for recognition.[95]

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[95] Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013; Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014.

Analysis

Combatting terrorism and violent radicalization is today among the top priorities of federal and regional policy makers in Belgium. Subsequent episodes of terrorist attacks committed by Jihadists – some of whom returned after fighting in Syria and were born and raised in Belgium – Paris and Brussels sent as shockwave throughout Belgium's society and its politicians. Especially since the attack on the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris on January 7 2015, the governments were alerted that something should be done to prevent violent radicalization among certain individuals of the society. Even more deadly terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13 2015 and in Brussels on March 22 2016 made some politicians to conclude that in todays Belgian society, "there is a passive undercurrent of people who hold sympathies with violent Islamism."[96]

In what follows, I will first give insight into the initial responses of the federal, Flemish and Francophone parliaments on the events occurring in Paris and Brussels. I focus on the first plenary sittings of each parliament right after the terrorist attacks of January 7 2015, November 13 2015 and March 22 2016. I will concentrate on the interpretations of the Members of Parliament (MPs) and government ministers given to the events and which (initial) policy proposals were put forward by the governing majority.

I then will give an overview of the counter-radicalization measures taken which are relevant for the purpose of my research. This overview will be the basis on which I built my more elaborate investigation into the parliament and committee debates around these policies and their implementation.

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[96] FL PLEN 14-01-2015

An initial response

It should be noted from the outset that during the plenary session following each terrorist attack, the overall majority of MPs and government ministers reacted in a moderate and composed way. There were very few – if none – controversial or polemic statements made concerning the position of Muslims or Islam in society. The only outspoken voice in this regard was – unsurprisingly – the right-wing populist and Flemish nationalist party Vlaams Belang ('Flemish Interest', VB), which throughout the debates reiterated the often heard statement that "mass-immigration and multiculturalism" are to be blamed for the attacks and that we are to stop the recognition and funding of Islam.[97] The positions of this and other opposition parties is however beyond the scope of this research and will therefore not be handled in detail.

The federal debate

The federal parliament held its first plenary session after the terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo one day after the tragic events. During his homage to the victims, the President of the Chamber of Representatives describes them as an open assault to our freedom of speech. The only rightful response he claims, is "dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation, in order to achieve a world of more fraternity, solidarity and humanity." A similar message could be heard from prime minister Charles Michel, who urged "all democrats to stand up against hate preachers and terrorists."

The appeal for more unity and solidarity was reiterated by several MPs of the governing majority. Both CD&V and MR argued for more cooperation and consultation with civil society and the religious communities to tackle the issue of radicalization. MR: "The Muslims are the best allies at our side to combat Islamism, as they have repeatedly stressed that they do not want their good name to be strained." CD&V was the only party who indirectly urged the Muslim

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[97] FED PLEN 08-01-2015

community to denounce the attacks: "All groups, directly or indirectly involved, have to reject any type of violence uncompromisingly, and they have to keep on doing so in the future."[98]

While the debate in the federal parliament following the Charlie Hebdo attacks remained rather general and normative, this was different when the Chamber of Representative convened on November 19 2015, six days after the 13 November Paris attacks. The prime minister presented 18 measures to combat terrorism and radicalism, which would supplement the 12 measures already taken mid January. In line with the competences of the federal government, the policies focused mostly on security, control and (legal) repression.

This time, PM Charles Michel was more straightforward in saying that "we do not want extremist hate preachers in out country." He urged for an immediate and general screening of all preachers present in the country. He acknowledges the freedom of worship as a constitutional right, but at the same time pointed to the fact that "places of worship must not become spots for the diffusion of Jihadism." Therefore, non-recognized or illegal places of worship are to be dismantled and the financing of mosques (most notably from abroad) should be more transparent. The recognition of mosques and the formation of imams must be better regulated.

The plea for more state supervision over mosques is most explicitly supported by N-VA. One MP states that there is a need to "go and see what is really going on in these places." It seems that in this debate, freedom of religion and the separation of state and church are secondary compared to the security concern. Governing party Open VLD goes even further by stating that there are limits to the concessions and compromises granted in the name of freedom of religion. "Today we hear unacceptable statements about women, about homosexuals, about unbelievers. (…) In our society secular laws apply, on which we can not concede a single bit. With people who do not accept this, who consider their religion superior, we can not live

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[98] FED PLEN 08-01-2015

together."[99] This is the first time (and as we will see certainly not the last) that freedom of religion and the secularist principle are put in opposition against each other.

The sentiment in the federal parliament – as in the Flemish and Francophone – after the Brussels attacks on March 22 2016 was one of consternation. Two days after the deadliest terrorist attack on Belgian soil in modern history, MPs convened for the first time to seek answers on the many questions that needed an answer. Rather than proposing entirely new measures, politicians of the governing majority reiterated previous statements and urged for a faster implementation of some of the decisions already taken under the previous counter-radicalization plans. There was a clear appeal for national unity. CD&V asked the parliament for dialogue rather than polarization "with those who respect our society and shares our norms and values." They further argue that "we should not consider a whole community as suspect, but rather ward off the extremists."[100]

The Flemish debate

Similar to the debates on the federal level, the tone in the Flemish parliament was cooperative and moderate. A week after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, it held a first plenary session to discuss possible measures. CD&V was quick to point out that Muslim extremists only form a minority, and that therefore "it is not correct to point the finger at one specific religion, let alone all religions." Still, N-VA was ready to point out that "a part of Islam does not conform our norms and values." One MP even said that this part of the population seems to be "stuck in an unshakable truth which in my view lays centuries behind us."

Interestingly, this aversion from (part of) Islam seems not to preclude policy makers from looking in the direction of the Muslim community for solutions to the problem of violent radicalization. All three governing parties are indeed happy to note what they perceive as the

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[99] FED PLEN 19-11-2015
[100] FED PLEN 24-03-2016

increased willingness of the Muslim community to cooperate. Several majority MPs put high hopes on the so-called 'interreligious dialogue' in the field of education. After many years of neglect, the training of Islam teachers, chaplains and imams seems to have finally embarked on a track of professionalization. Minister of Education Hilde Crevits is quick to note that this new trajectory was established "on demand and after consultation with the Muslim community itself".

The separation of church and state demands that it is the religious community itself who organizes the training of imams. The state authorities can only play a facilitating role, as is the case in Flanders. But what is this 'interreligious dialogue' then about? Throughout the debate, MPs stress certain 'fundamental principles' which are undisputable: the equality between men and women, the separation of church and state, freedom of speech. Although these are all legitimate principles which find acceptance among large parts of Muslim and non-Muslim people, their alleged 'universal' character immediately attaches a normative constrain to the dialogue. It is clear from the outset that it is the government that decides who it speaks to and about what. Implicit and explicit allusions are made to the development of a 'European Islam', sometimes blurring the boundaries between political and theological/religious spheres of influence.

An example of this asymmetric dialogue is found in one of the propositions for more cooperation between the state authorities and the Muslim community. To reach out to young foreign fighters who returned from Syria, N-VA proposes to collaborate with 'key figures' of the community. They have to "speak the language of the *real* [emphasis added] Koran, not the one found on internet or social media".[101] Thus rather than an all-open debate between equals, it is the government who selects the speaking terms.

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[101] FL PLEN 14-01-2015

Nevertheless, the Flemish government would continue to stress the importance of and interreligious dialogue during each parliamentary session following a new terrorist episode. On November 18 2015, Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois was happy to note that in a common statement, all recognized worldviews in Belgium "unconditionally endorse the basic principles of our pluralist, democratic state of law."[102] A day after the 2016 Brussels attacks, representatives of the religious and non-religious philosophies in Belgium attended the plenary session in the Flemish parliament.[103]

The Francophone debate

I now turn to the parliamentary debates of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels. Three weeks after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, the MPs had the chance to discuss the counter-radicalization plans of the Francophone government for the first time. One of the core elements of the 'Plan de lutte contre la radicalisation' was to detect and combat radical messages and hate speech in society, most notably in education, media and among youth workers. In doing this, the government not only wants to prevent further radical incitement, but it also seeks to (re)affirm its own interpretation of society. This is most visible in education: the French community will be the first in Belgium to insert courses on citizenship in its curriculum for public schools. In the meantime, the government will make sure "that the formation of Islam teachers gives them an introduction to our core values."

Minister-president Rudy Demotte is quick to point out that with this policy aim, he does not want to stigmatize one particular religion, but that they concern all religions. He further adds that the government will propose to the Muslim community a broadcast on a public channel. Although the minister-president does not specify what he aims to achieve with this public broadcast, it is clear that it anticipates the Muslim community reiterating "our core values".

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[102] FL PLEN 18-11-2015
[103] FL PLEN 23-03-2016

In the subsequent debate, PS embarks with arguing that "la laïcité de L'État" is the sine qua non of our principles of freedom of religion and freedom of thought. The majority party then goes on the explain the reasons for conceding a public broadcast to the Muslim community: "First of all, it is a way to make the teachings of Islam accessible to those who are interested, other than risking to entrust them to radical preachers. On the other hand, it puts the different religious communities of the Federation who respect the foundations of our democracy, on an equal footing."

cdH is happy to note that the government takes the task to modernize and professionalize the formation of Muslim religious executives serious. An expert committee will be set up to make policy proposals and to reflect on the possibility of a 'Belgian Islam'.

A central aspect of the counter-radicalization plans of the Francophone government, is the shaping of a 'counter-narrative'. All stakeholders involved should play their part in thwarting radical messages from reaching youngsters. Therefore, Islam teachers, social and youth workers are to be trained, first in the general knowledge of Islam, the relation between religion and the state and in knowledge about radical groups. Secondly, their capacity to detect and assess signs of radicalization should be increased.[104]

The parliamentary debate after the Paris attacks in November 2015 continues along the same lines. The PS sees the prospective citizenship courses as an illustration of their call to "regroup around what unites us." Indeed, more than ever, there can be no contradiction in education "between the collective and the individual interest." Another MP points out that starting from the beginning of 2016, courses on citizenship and the fight against radicalization will be given in prisons. The underlying argument goes that "a well-informed and educated citizen, is in control of his own life."

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[104] FWB PLEN 28-01-2015

It is by now well accepted by all MPs – even from the opposition parties – that the only way forward is through a strong affirmation of the core values. cdH: "In schools this means to accentuate our values and the institutions which founded our Western democracy, in particular through the schooling in philosophy and citizenship." Furthermore, the formation of Islam teachers in secondary education should be elevated: "these teachers should not only have a good training, but also possess an understanding of our society which can deconstruct fundamentalist discourses."[105]

It is indeed striking that, similar to the Flemish parliament, there seems to be a large agreement among MPs of majority and opposition parties about the solution to combat radicalization. This is further illustrated by the fact that during the plenary session following the Brussels attacks in March 2016, the debate mostly reaffirmed measures which were already taken.[106]

Action plans and parliamentary committees

In the remainder of this chapter, I will give a more extensive and elaborate overview of the different policy measures taken by the federal and regional governments in Belgium to combat violent radicalism. I will now discuss each set of (proposed) counter-radicalization policies separately using examples from the different governments. This will be followed in the next chapter with a more analytical discussion of the implications of these measures of the accommodation of Islam and the position of the Muslim community in Belgium.

After an initial reaction on the tragic events in the parliament, the different governments quickly adopted plans and policy measures to tackle the issue of violent radicalism. After the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks in January 2015, the federal government presented "12 measures

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[105] FWB PLEN 25-11-2015
[106] FWB PLEN 23-03-2016

against radicalism and terrorism."[107] One of the measures was to combat radicalization in prisons, which was further concretized by the minister of justice in the March 2015 "Action Plan against radicalization in Prisons".[108] In November 2015, 18 new measures in the fight against terrorism were adopted.[109] In February 2016, a counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism plan specifically targeting the Brussels region was devised.[110] In line with the federal competences, all decided measures have a repressive nature and are related to the fields of police, justice, state security and the army.

Both community governments from their side focused more on preventive measures in the fields of education, social services and media. It is evident that because of the preventive nature of these policies, the Muslim community and its representatives will play a more decisive role in the counter-radicalization plans on the regional level. The government of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels adopted its first counter-radicalization plan in January 2015.[111] The plan in part relied on measures decided under the anti-discrimination plan approved in December 2014.[112] In December 2015, minister of higher education Jean-Claude Marcourt presented his "Plan pour la creation d'un islam de Belgique".[113] The Flemish government presented its first action plan in April 2015[114], based on the "Concept Note on the prevention of radicalization"[115] issued earlier that year.

Besides these governmental decisions, the issue of radicalization was fiercely debated in the different parliaments and parliamentary committees. On the federal level, both after the January

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[107] FED 16-01-15 12 measures – Combatting radicalism and terrorism
[108] FED 11-03-2015 Action Plan against radicalization in prisons
[109] FED 19-11-2015 18 measures – combatting terrorism
[110] FED 01/02-2016 'Channel Plan'
[111] FWB 21-01-2015 Plan d'action pour la prévention du radicalisme et l'amélioration du vivre ensemble
[112] FWB 18-12-2014 Plan anti-discrimination 2014-2019
[113] FWB 07-12-2015 Plan Marcourt pour la création d'un islam de Belgique
[114] FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalisation processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism
[115] FL 16-01-2015 Concept Note on the prevention of radicalization

and November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, a Joint Committee of Justice and Interior Affairs gathered to discuss the matter. On other occasions, the topic of violent radicalism was mostly debated in the Committee on Interior Affairs and the Committee on Justice. Responsible ministers are minister of interior Jan Jambon and minister of justice Koen Geens. Besides this, a Temporary Committee on Counter-Terrorism was established at the end of 2015, whose reports are not yet made public. After the terrorist attack in Brussels, an Inquiry Committee was set up to find out what went wrong during the tragic events of March 22.

In Flanders, a Committee on the Prevention of Violent Radicalization was created after the Charlie Hebdo attacks. The conclusions of its hearings were presented to the Flemish government and accepted by the parliament in a resolution in May 2015.[116] The Committee gathered 14 times and since May 2016 started discussions with the competent ministers on their progress in counter-radicalization. Besides, the issue was mainly debates in the Committees on Culture, Youth, Sports and Media, the Committee on Administration, Local Governance, Civic Integration and Urban Policy and the Committee on Education. Competent ministers are: minister of education Hilde Crevits, minister of public governance, civic integration and equal opportunities Liesbeth Homans, minister of welfare Jo Vandeurzen and minister of media, culture and youth Sven Gatz.

The Federation Wallonia-Brussels was the only one not to set up a parliamentary committee on the issue of radicalization. Policies were mostly debated in the Committee on Education and the Committee on Higher Education, Research and Media. Relevant ministers are the minister of education, culture and childhood Joëlle Milquet (replaced in April 2016 by Marie-Martine Schyns) and minister of higher education, research and media Jean-Claude Marcourt. This last one is most notable because of his initiative to establish an expert committee on the training of Muslim religious executives and on religious public broadcasting. The committee was presided

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[116] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism

by professors Françoise Tulkens et Andrea Rea and mainly consisted of scholars of the three main Francophone universities and prominent members of the MEB.[117] The concluding report lead to the adoption of the already mentioned 'Plan Marcourt' on the creation of a Belgian Islam.[118]

A role for the Muslim Executive of Belgium

After years of controversies, malfunctioning and internal conflicts, in May 2014 a new Muslim Executive was established in Belgium. The appointment seems to have come at the right moment. Faced with the issue of foreign fighters and increased radicalization among a minority of – predominantly Muslim – citizens, policy makers started to look increasingly in the direction of the Muslim community for solutions. While the Executive originally was established as the representative body of the Muslim community in order to deal with religious affairs in the public sphere, partly due to the newly devised counter-radicalization measures, their tasks and responsibilities seem the have broadened.

With new responsibilities however come new duties. Indeed, the Belgian authorities have never shied away from investing their own interests in the Muslim Executive. The new rapprochement made this conditional relationship even clearer. This is illustrated by a statement made by N-VA during a plenary debate on the possibility to provide a counter-narrative against radical messages: "We want to empower the Muslim Executive, but this community has to do more than that. It has to provide a counter-discourse itself, a 'we' which condemns these [terrorist] actions." [119] The fact that authorities look increasingly towards the Muslim community is understandable and probably legitimate. I will argue however, that this rapprochement is (1) highly conditional and leaves in place unequal power relations and (2) is

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[117] FWB 18-03/04-12-15 Commission concernant la formation des cadres musulmans et les émissions concédées
[118] FWB 07-12-2015 Plan Marcourt pour la création d'un islam de Belgique
[119] FL PLEN 27-05-2015

framed almost exclusively in a terms of radicalization and security. Despite these constraining premises, the outcome for the MEB might ironically enough be a positive one.

A good example is the following. In early 2016, different media reported on new internal power struggles within the Muslim Executive. In an interview, president of the MEB Noureddine Smaïli stated that "Four hardliners are trying to sabotage our reforms." The four conservative members are not supportive of the Executive's inclination to modernize its functioning and to collaborate more closely with the authorities.[120] In a first reaction to the commotion, justice minister Koen Geens stated that "Every year the Belgian state endows the Executive with an important subsidy. I think one can expect – as do the president and the majority of the Executive's members – that they help to create an Islam in accordance with our European culture."[121]

The creation of a 'Belgian' or 'European Islam' is a central theme in the debate on the position of Islam in Belgium today. I will come back to this topic in more detail later in this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to point out that while the urge for a European Islam is supported by the government and a majority of members in the MEB, every opposition is indeed framed as a sign of radicalization and strongly denounced. Something which can obstruct an open and democratic debate on the future of Islam in Belgium and the role of the MEB.

On the other hand, a well-functioning representative body is highly desirable since policy makers are inclined to engage actively with the MEB for the purpose of preventing violent radicalism. On the federal level, Islam counsellors are involved more closely in combatting radicalization in prisons. On the regional level, Flemish and Francophone ministers engage with

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[120] "Wie streeft naar modernisering, krijgt het altijd hard te verduren" (Who strives for modernization, has to endure a hard time) In *De Standaard*, 20-01-2016. http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20160120_02079738

[121] "Moslimexecutieve moet helpen Europese islam te creëren" (The Muslim Executive should help to create European Islam) In *De Redactie*, 20-01-2016. http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/binnenland/1.2551189

the MEB in the fields of education, the recognition of places of worship, the formation of imams, the provision of counter-discourse, media representation and so forth.

In each debate, politicians favor a moderate representative body which is cooperative and in line with Western 'norms and values'. The fact that the MEB does not always live up to this expectations, makes certain wonder whether there are alternatives to achieve the political goal of a European Islam. This is noticeable in the debate on the formation of imams in Belgium. While the MEB is responsible for appointing imams in the local Muslim communities, attempts to establish a formal imam training in Belgium have failed so far. Open VLD wonders whether there is a possibility to engage with "the progressive forces of the Muslim community" in order to establish such a training program.[122]

One important change within the MEB itself has been made in 2016. After negotiations with the minister of justice, the Executive from now one has two sub-councils, one for each linguistic region, overseen by a federal entity which decides the general strategy of the Executive.[123]

Hate preachers

To understand some of the repressive and preventive measures taken to combat radicalization, we have to turn to the history of Islam in Belgium. The Muslim community in Belgium has long been understood as governed 'from abroad'. Already in 1967, the Saudi king was granted a 99-year rent-free lease of what soon after would become the Great Mosque of Brussels. Still the biggest mosque of Brussels today, it became the seat of the Islamic Cultural Center (ICC), the first interlocutor with the Belgian government on matters concerning the Muslim community.[124] From the 1980s and 1990s, Saudi-Arabia started to actively promote its radical Wahhabist interpretation of Islam, also in Belgium. In the meantime, Turkish Muslim

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[122] FL COM EDU 19-05-2016
[123] FED COM JU 03-02-2016
[124] Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013.

communities increasingly came under the influence of international networks as the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs Diyanet and the Millî Görüş network. Today, most imams preaching in Belgium are trained in Morocco, Saudi-Arabia and Turkey.[125] At the same time, the country saw the emergence of radical Islamist organizations. The most notable one is Sharia4Belgium, known for preaching Salafism and hatred towards non-Muslims. The groups was designated a terrorist organization in February 2015 and its spokesmen, the notorious Fouad Belkacem was sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment.[126]

These and other events have made Belgian politicians wary of Islamist influences from abroad. It is therefore no surprise that after the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015 and the established link of the perpetrators with Islamist networks in Belgium, the federal government called for a "screening of all preachers in order to detain or expel all those who preach hate". It also decided to proceed the dismantling of "non-recognized places of worship who spread Jihadism".[127]

The idea to tackle the issue of hate preachers present on the Belgian territory had already taken shape before the tragic Paris attacks. In November 2015, a working group was established to list all known radical preachers and imams, with the purpose of refusing them entry into the country.[128] Minister of asylum and migration Theo Francken urged for a specific screening of all Qatari and Saudi imams in order to curb Salafist preachers.[129] Questioned about this arguable discriminatory measure, interior minister Jan Jambon stated in parliament that each possible

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[125] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014.
[126] "Fouad Belkacem veroordeeld tot twaalf jaar cel, Jejoen 40 maanden" (Fouad Belkacem sententensed to twelve years of prison, Jejoen 40 months) In *De Standaard*, 11-02-2015. http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20150211_01523191
[127] FED 19-11-2015 18 measures – combatting terrorism
[128] FED COM IA 28-01-2015
[129] FED COM IA 28-01-2015

threat stemming from radical preachers is analyzed indiscriminately by the State Security Service and no approach exists targeting specific nationals.[130]

The expulsion of radical imams however proves not to be very easy. In July 2015, minister of asylum and migration Theo Francken said he had plans to expel an imam with Moroccan-Dutch nationality known to the authorities for spreading Jihadi propaganda and Salafism and calling for terrorist attacks.[131] The imam was active in Verviers, the same city where police forces foiled a terrorist plot in January 2015. The decision sparked a minor diplomatic row with the Dutch authorities, since they are not eager in taking in the hate preacher. After subsequent appeals from the imams himself, who argues that he is made into a 'scapegoat' by the Belgian minister, in March 2016 he was still residing in Belgium.[132]

Refusing entrance onto the territory therefore seems easier. In November 2014, Belgian authorities withdrew the entry visa for the leader of the Kuwait Muslim Brotherhood upon the argument that he would come to spread extremist, anti-Semitic and hateful messages at a Muslim fair in Brussels.[133] It is not surprising that many of the calls for a crackdown on alleged hate preachers comes from the right-wing populist party Vlaams Belang (VB). In response to a plenary question of VB, interior minister Jan Jambon was however clear that "it is evidently forbidden to spread hate preaching messages and to call up people to conduct terrorist attacks, but in a democracy freedom of speech and freedom of thought exist. These are holy principles for me as well."[134] Since the end of 2015, the issuance of entry visa for imams seeking to work for non-recognized mosques is put 'on hold' for an undetermined period of time.[135]

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[130] FED COM IA 11-02-2015
[131] FED COM IA 14-07-2015
[132] "Perquisition chez l'imam de Dison que Theo Francken veut expulser" In *La Meuse*, 26-03-2016. http://www.lameuse.be/1523261/article/2016-03-26/perquisition-chez-l-imam-de-dison-que-theo-francken-veut-expulser
[133] FED PLE 06-11-2014
[134] FED PLE 29-10-2015
[135] FL COM GA 12-04-2016

Overseeing mosque communities

This brings us to the closely related topic of the recognition of local Islamic places of worship. An often heard argument is that unregulated mosques are a source of extremist teaching and sustain Jihadi networks. As noted before, the recognition of local Islamic religious communities in Belgium is in a relatively early stage. Today, less than one in every four Muslim communities is recognized and regulated by the state.[136] The regulation of local places of worship is a shared responsibility of the federal and regional governments and the Muslim Executive of Belgium. For a local community to seek official recognition, the Executive compiles an application form which is sent to the regional administration. The application is scrutinized on the basis of several criteria[137] and screened on possible security threats by the State Security Service and the federal ministry of justice. Applicants which comply with all requirements are officially recognized by the regional government and subsidized by the federal state.[138]

Interestingly, the Flemish government has always been more reluctant towards the recognition of local Muslim communities than the Francophone community. While today one in every three mosques in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels is recognized by the authorities, in Flanders the recognition rate is below 20%.[139] Scholars justify this difference in part by the more closed attitude towards immigrants in Flanders, induced by the presence of radical right wing and nationalist political forces. The political landscape in the French-speaking region is characterized as more progressive, with a persisting strong influence of the socialist party.[140]

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[136] Loobuyck, Patrick, Jonathan Debeer, and Petra Meier. 2013.

[137] The most relevant criteria are: respecting the language legislation and civic integration duties of preaches, and observing the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights (source: Decree of the Flemish government on the recognition of the local church and religious communities, 30-09-2005)

[138] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014. "Imams in Flanders: A Research Note." *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 25 (4): 471–87.

[139] FWB COM HED 18-11-2014

[140] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014.

The historic reluctance from the part of the Flemish government to recognize local Muslim communities can explain why in the recent context of the fight against radicalization, the regulation of mosques has become a central topic of debate in Flanders. The resolution accepted by the Flemish parliament urging the government to take action against violent radicalism, states that there is "a historical aberration concerning the financing of mosques in Flanders". That only 28 local communities are officially recognized is "way too little in relation the overall number of known mosques".[141] The Flemish government accepts this point and – while it acknowledges that most process of radicalization take place outside of regulated mosques – sees an important role for local communities in preventing radicalization: "A mosque which is connected to the social world of young people can help to avoid that these youngsters resort to hate preachers or radical organizations."[142]

Although the task of mosques in connection to the issue of radicalization can thus be understood as a 'positive' one, the underlying motive from the part of the government to regulate more mosques is more induced by the 'negative' idea of control. The resolution indeed points out that "Recognition is of great importance, because it creates rights and duties for the concerned actors." [143] The elements of visibility and oversight are indeed stressed as the main arguments to recognize local Muslim communities. The Flemish minister responsible for the matter Liesbeth Homans points out in various parliamentary debates that "I prefer to recognize those mosques who all fulfill their duties, allowing the government to have a certain degree of control and impact."[144] The argument is elaborated more by governing party CD&V, which

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[141] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism
[142] FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalisation processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism
[143] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism
[144] FL PLEN 03-06-2015

sees recognition as a tool to further integration and participation, pointing to the recognition conditions as the use of Dutch and the civic integration of imams.[145]

Another important argument to recognize local Muslim communities relates to the above mentioned foreign influence on mosques in Belgium. Especially the financial support by Islamic or Islamist organizations from abroad is of increased concern to policy makers.[146] Officially, recognized mosques are not allowed to receive funding from abroad. But non-recognized communities escape this regulation. Therefore, minister of justice Koen Geens said he would examine whether it is possible for the Financial Intelligence Unit to screen non-recognized mosques on their (allegedly illegal) foreign financing.[147]

With such (proposed) measures, the freedom of speech and religion come into tension with the principles of integration and regulation. This point is taken up by the Flemish Resolution 366, which recognizes that the integration of Islam in Flanders "does not exclude academic or religious contacts with the original Muslim countries and their Islamic institutes." However, too strong a connection of local communities with such organizations "preclude them from taking up their full place in the Flemish society."[148]

This tension between freedom and control illustrates a core discrepancy in the relation for counter-radicalization policies and multiculturalism. On the one hand, a mechanism of officially recognizing and embedding local religious communities in the country of residence is devised for these communities to be able to freely and unconstrained profess their religious practices. On the other hand, public recognition, integration and financing attach certain requirements, conditions and elements of control from the part of the government to this

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[145] FL COM RAD 15-12-2015
[146] FED PLEN 27-05-2015
[147] FED PL 28-01-2016
[148] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism

mechanism. The constitutional element of freedom of religion plays a mitigating role in this regard, as will be shown by the case of the imam appointment and formation.

Imams

Within local Muslim communities, the imam not only has a religious and theological role, but also provides guidance on socio-psychological and socio-cultural questions.[149] It is therefore no surprise that when trying to engage with Muslim communities to combat radicalization, authorities look in the direction of the imam. According to articles 21 and 181 of the Belgian constitution, it is the religious representative body which decides on the appointment of imams and the requirements it attaches to them in terms of training and education.[150] In practice, this means that imams are selected independently by the MEB and recognized and paid by the federal government. The latter requires the imam to have knowledge about the Belgian legislation, sufficient proficiency in the regional language and training in accountancy.[151]

Similar to the recognition of local mosque communities, the payment of imams knew a slow start. Before 2007, not a single imam had been paid by the Belgian government.[152] Most imams preaching in Belgium are formed abroad. Very often, they lack the necessary knowledge about the local societal situation. Even language is a problem. Of those imams recognized in Francophone Belgium, only 20% speaks French.[153] With the radicalization phenomenon high on the political agenda, those 'foreign imams' are under increased scrutiny. Something described very clearly by this Open VLD MP: "I have to admit that I am scared of a system in which imams come here for just a few months, without knowing anything about the society in which they end up, and therefore without the ability to bring the message which best fits in this

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[149] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014.
[150] FED Constitution Art. 21 and Art. 181 http://www.senate.be/doc/const_nl.html
[151] FED QA 19-09-2015
[152] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014.
[153] FWB COM HED 17-05-2016

society, for the simple reason that they do not have the knowledge to do this. Very often, they can only encourage radicalization within Islam, which according to me needs a European pillar, in order for it to evolve within our society in a normal way." [154]

Many politicians therefore called for a professionalization of the imam training, preferably in a Belgian framework. The Federation Wallonia-Brussels was very active in tackling the issue of the imam training. In March 2015, minister of higher education, research and media Jean-Claude Marcourt established an expert committee with scholar and prominent members of the Muslim community to look into the possibility of creating a formal training program for imams in Francophone Belgium.[155] The 'Plan Marcourt pour la création d'un islam de Belgique' adopted in December 2015 is the political outcome of the recommendations made by this committee. The plan aims at a better training of imams preaching in Belgium by giving them French language courses and extending the academic offer in terms of Islam studies.[156] The Plan further led to the establishment of an 'Institute on the development of Islam education', which has the task to coordinate all measures taken in the field of Islam education.[157]

Flanders was slightly more restrained in their approach to the issue of imam formation. While the issue was equally understood by politicians as highly problematic, the government seems to leave the initiative to the Muslim Executive. The Flemish Action Plan on counter-radicalization reads that "the government want to raise awareness among the MEB on the importance of qualitative training for imams, encompassing a knowledge of Dutch and the local context."[158] A similar message can be found in Resolution 366, which says that "It is up to each

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[154] FL COM EDU 19-03-2015
[155] FWB COM HED 12-05-2015
[156] FWB 07-12-2015 Plan Macourt pour la création d'un islam de Belgique
[157] FWB COM HED 17-05-2016
[158] FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalisation processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism

religious community to organize the training of its ministers. The Flemish government can play a facilitating role in this regard."[159]

This does not mean that no action is taken in Flanders whatsoever. Similar to the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, courses on societal orientation and Dutch were devised and tailored specifically for imams. Since the academic year 2014-2015, two initiatives have been launched by Flemish universities: a one-year course on Islamic theology at KU Leuven and a professionalization pathway for imams-in-training in cooperation with the Antwerp University Association.[160] In the same time, Flanders is the only region where a civic integration program is compulsory for all imams coming from outside the EU.[161]

The advantages of 'homegrown' imams in the battle against radicalization are well acknowledged by many politicians. According to the Flemish Resolution on counter-radicalization, "knowledge about the religion, the Dutch language and the foundations of our society" are indispensable for an imam to play its key role in society.[162] Therefore it is all the more striking that professional training programs still do not exist. Despite the fact that it is up to each religion to devise their own trainings for religious personnel, some MPs urge the government to take quick action, if necessary only with a certain (progressive) part of the Muslim community.[163]

Most politicians are well aware of the possible legal pitfalls when discussing the issue of imam training. Attaching specific requirements onto the appointment and payment of imams is possibly in breach with the principle of freedom of religion inscribed in the Constitution. Some politicians seem to speak with two tongues in this regard. The Flemish minister-president Geert

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[159] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism
[160] FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalisation processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism
[161] FL COM INT 23-06-2015
[162] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism
[163] FL COM GA 21-04-2016

Bourgeois pointed out in parliament that "in Flanders we do not organize imam trainings. This is a matter for the religions themselves." But a bit later in the same debate, he opens up the possibility "to attach certain preconditions onto the recognition and financing of imams with regard to their training."[164] In the FWB, minister Jean-Claude Marcourt acknowledged that with his initiative to look into the creation of training requirements of imams, he comes close to the religious sphere. He therefore stresses that "Such recognition must also respect the principle of non-interference of the political in the spiritual, which is no unimportant task in this exercises."[165]

Islam education

When it comes to preventing radicalism among young people, education is often seen as one – maybe the most important – policy tool to ease tensions in society, foster mutual understanding and combat hate speech and discrimination. It is therefore no surprise that both in the Flemish and Francophone parliament and among the concerned governments, Islam education was high on the agenda. If we look at some facts and figures, it is clear that this is not a moment to soon.

Belgian primary and secondary education can be divided in two main groups: public or state schools organized by the regional or local governments, and 'subsidized free schools' predominantly organized by the educational organization affiliated to the Catholic Church. The Catholic network is by far the largest, with almost 70% of all Flemish pupils enrolled in Catholic primary and secondary schools.[166] Despite the title, most Catholic schools are not actively religious, and therefore attract many students from other religious backgrounds, such as Muslims, as well. However, those Muslim pupils who prefer to receive a course on their religion, can only do so in public schools organized by the state. Each public school is required

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[164] FL COM GA 05-01-2016
[165] FWB COM HED 12-05-2015
[166] FL Flemish education in figures 2014-2015.
http://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/publicaties/detail/flemish-education-in-figures-2014-2015

to offer courses in one of the six recognized religions upon the pupil's request. The religious education itself is organized by the representative body of the designated religion, in the case of Islam this is the already mentioned Muslim Executive of Belgium.[167]

So far the good news. If we look at it more closely, several problems concerning the Islam education in public schools arise. In March 2015, Flemish minister of education Hilde Crevits stated in parliament that only one in every seven Islam teachers has the right qualifications. One in every four teachers even does not possess a degree in higher education.[168] Meanwhile, both in the north and the south, control and oversight over these teachers is poorly managed. While Islamic religious education in public schools in Belgium began in 1978, the supervision was long done by the Saudi-influenced and long contested Islamic Cultural Centre. Today, inspection is done by the MEB. The first school inspectors of Islam religious education were appointed only in 2005.[169] Today, in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation there are only three inspectors for 650 Islam teachers.[170] In Flanders, the situation is even worse, with three inspectors for 789 teachers.[171]

Although this situation is known for a longer period of time, the issue of radicalization has brought it higher on the political agenda. Both regional governments attach great importance to education when it comes to preventing radicalization and extremism among youth.[172] In the FWB, the issue of Islam education is covered by the already mentioned plan of higher education minister Jean-Claude Marcourt. The Plan Marcourt supports initiatives taken by universities and the Muslim Executive of Belgium to establish a didactic program for religious teachers of

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[167] Torfs, Rik. 2015. "Religion and State in Belgium." *Insight Turkey* 17 (1): 97–119.
[168] FL PLEN 13-04-2016
[169] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014.
[170] FWD COM EDU 03-03-2015
[171] FL QA 17-03-2015
[172] FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalisation processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism; FWB 21-01-2015 Plan d'action pour la prévention du radicalisme et l'amélioration du vivre ensemble.

Islam and a multidisciplinary program on 'Islam in the contemporary world'. It further aims at the creation of an interuniversity chair on 'practical' Islamology; that is the study of contemporary Islam.[173] The most striking of all taken measures is however the founding of an 'Institute on the development of Islam education' in May 2016, which aims at bringing together all initiatives taken in the field of Islam education in the French-speaking community and formulate novel proposals for the creation of a Muslim theology faculty in cooperation with Flanders. The institute not only targets Islam teachers, but also imams, religious counsellors and social and cultural workers.[174]

Similar to the measures taken by Marcourt, the Flemish Action Plan aims to improve Islam education through a better training and capacity building among Islam teachers. Moreover, the inspection should be improved in accordance with the MEB.[175] Flemish minister of education Hilde Crevits believes in 'interfaith dialogue' and the mitigating power of Islam education in preventing radicalization in classrooms. Therefore, she argues that "The different religions should carry out more actively our values."[176]

In parallel to the discussion about the training of imams, the principle of freedom of religion prescribes that it is the religious community itself who should organize religious education. However, more than in Francophone Belgium, Flemish MPs openly question the relevance of the MEB in managing Islam education in public schools. N-VA wonders whether "the Muslim Executive is currently the right institution" to select and control Islam teachers.[177] Partly in response to this criticism ousted by the own coalition partners, education minister Hilde Crevits has asked the MEB to devise an action plan to tackle the issue.[178] In May 2016, the MEB

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[173] FWB 07-12-2015 Plan Macourt pour la création d'un islam de Belgique
[174] FWB 07-12-2015 Plan Macourt pour la création d'un islam de Belgique
[175] FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalisation processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism
[176] FL PLEN 13-04-2016
[177] FL PLEN 13-04-2016
[178] FL PLEN 27-04-2016

proposed to improve the quality of Islam education on five axis: an update of the class materials, an increased offer of Islam teacher trainings, an update of the teaching requirements and a reinforcement of the inspectorate and the oversight body.[179]

Fed up with the situation, which some MPs describe as "hopeless,"[180] other solutions are brought up. One is the proposal by Open VLD and the opposing socialist part SP.A to abolish religious classes all together and instead devise a neutral course on 'religion, ethics and philosophy'.[181] The idea is however not backed by majority parties CD&V and N-VA. The latter argues that the state should be able to attach certain criteria onto Islam teachers: "Only those can teach Islam who recognize the equality of men and women, gay rights, human rights and the theory of evolution."[182]

Radicalization in prisons

Another aspect of the counter-radicalization policies for which is increasingly looked in the direction of the Muslim community is the issue of radicalization in prisons. The topic has been much debated in politics and media in Belgium in recent years. After the March 2016 terrorist attack in Brussels, Belgian media reported that upon hearing the news of the attacks, certain prisoners voiced their approval and outright support.[183]The prevention of further spreading of extremist ideas in Belgian prisons was adopted by the federal government as one of its 12 counter-radicalization measures after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015. To achieve this goal, closer cooperation and coordination with the prison staff, and especially the Islam counsellors was necessary.[184]

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[179] FL COM EDU 19-05-2016
[180] FL PLEN 27-04-2016
[181] FL COM EDU 12-01-2016
[182] FL COM GA 21-04-2016
[183] "'Doe mij ook maar halal' Hoe mijn celgenoten stap voor stap radicaliseerden" (For me halal please: how my cellmates radicalized step by step." In *De Standaard*, 02-04-2016. http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20160331_02213282
[184] FED 16-01-15 12 measures – Combatting radicalism and terrorism

Islam counsellors are active in Belgian prisons since 2007. They give theological and socio-psychological guidance and support to Muslim prisoners upon request. They are appointed by the Muslim Executive of Belgium (MEB) and paid by the federal state, although the regional authorities are entitled to appoint Islam counsellors as well.[185]

On March 11 2015, minister of justice Koen Geens presented his 'Action Plan against radicalization in prisons' which explained the measures in more detail. The Plan states that Islam counsellors play a "crucial role" in preventing ideologically inspired processes of radicalization, as these are "often rooted in radical interpretations of the Islam." The goal is not only to have more counsellors, but also "an improvement of the quality of the recruitment and the training [of Islam counsellors] in close cooperation with the MEB." In the long run, the minister wants all Islam counsellors to possess a degree in Islamic theology. Therefore, he points to the communities, who are in charge of education and should encourage Dutch and French speaking universities to organize such training.[186] This call was heard by minister of higher education Jean-Claude Marcourt, which engaged himself to theological training for all Islam counsellors in prisons and hospitals.[187]

Counter-discourse

A last policy field in which the active engagement of the Muslim community is asked, is that of so-called 'counter-discourse'. For their religious and identity questions, youngsters increasingly turn to sources which are hard to control, such as the internet. Faced with this fact and the knowledge that Islamist organizations more and more carry out their propaganda through the internet, policy makers needed to come up with new ways of reaching young people

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[185] Debeer, Jonathan, Patrick Loobuyck, and Petra Meier. 2011. "Imams En Islamconsulenten in Vlaanderen: Hoe Zijn Ze Georganiseerd?" (Imams and Islam counsellors in Flanders: how are they organized?) Steunpunt Gelijkekansenbeleid, Consortium Universiteit Antwerpen en Universiteit Hasselt.
[186] FED 11-03-2015 Action Plan against radicalization in prisons
[187] FWB 07-12-2015 Plan Macourt pour la création d'un islam de Belgique

who are receptive for such messages with the aim of preventing them from turning to violent or radical behavior. Many politicians believe that moderate voices within Muslim communities can provide a successful counter-narrative to the deceptive messages of Islamist organizations.[188]

This is why the Flemish government established a network of some 20 'Islam experts', whose goal it is to provide an anti-radicalization message in schools. The Action Plan on counter-radicalization in this regard writes that "a network of experiences Islam experts who posses a thorough knowledge of Islamic theology and are familiar with the environment of these youngsters, can provide an interpretation on Islam and the Islamic norms and values to youngsters."[189] The network is commissioned by the Flemish government but operates largely in independence and on voluntary basis.[190]

Next to providing a counter-discourse in schools, the Flemish government also assisted the Muslim Executive in setting up an informative telephone line. Similar to the network of Islam experts, the line aims at providing young people with theological guidance on the interpretation of the Koran and Islam.[191] In April 2016, the minister-president of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels said in parliament that the possibility to establish a similar telephone line in in southern Belgium will be examined.[192]

Media and multiculturalism

This brings us to a second tier of policy measures which have been devised to prevent further radicalization. These relate more to awareness raising and the creation of a receptive environment with regard to cultural and religious diversity. With the emergence of the issue of

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[188] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism
[189] FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalisation processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism
[190] FL PLEN 27-01-2016
[191] FL COM RAD 09-11-2015
[192] FWB COM GA 18-04-2016

radicalization, attention grew about the role of new and traditional media and their relation to diversity and multiculturalism. In December 2014, the Francophone government adopted an anti-discrimination plan which – among other goals – aimed at combatting hateful messages on the internet.[193] In a more recent statement, the minister of equal opportunities Isabelle Simonis said she was working on a 'periodic barometer' about diversity in the media. Such a review should "allow the different editors to question the way they represent equality and diversity in their broadcasts, with the goal to take ameliorating measures."[194]

In a similar vein, the Flemish Action Plan on the prevention of radicalization states that the government "will consult with local and national media and develop a media strategy which counters polarizing coverage, which encourages social cohesion and supports democratic values."[195] This measure was supported by the parliamentary resolution adopted in May 2015, which argues that "The media have a role to play in creating an inclusive society by reflecting the diversity of the Flemish society." The resolution further urges the Flemish public broadcast company (VRT) to pay attention in their broadcasts "for people who on the basis of Islam, knowledge of the Koran, experience and credibility, can bring a positive story in the media on dialogue, tolerance and a socially positive interpretation of religious commitment."[196]

Public broadcasting

The debate on more diversity in public media took a very explicit turn, especially in Francophone Belgium. The above mentioned expert committee on creation of a 'Belgian Islam,' apart from working on an improved training offer for Muslim religious executives, the committee urges the government to take active steps in the establishment of a public broadcast

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[193] FWB 18-12-2014 Plan anti-discrimination 2014-2019
[194] FWB COM HED 03-05-2016
[195] FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalisation processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism
[196] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism

conceded to the Muslim community. The committee argues that such broadcast should be created by an independent Muslim organization and will improve social cohesion and general understanding about Islam.[197]

Such a broadcast would alter a historic inequality. Despite the fact that since the official recognition of Islam in 1974, Muslims have the right to establish a broadcast on public television, this right has not been used for many years.[198] While other religious communities such as the Catholic, Jewish and Protestant faith have well established broadcasts since quiet some time, Muslims were long neglected.[199] In Flanders, Muslim television and radio programs only started in September 2011.[200]

Minister of high education, research and media Jean-Claude Marcourt was strongly in favor of the committee's proposition and incorporated it into his already mentioned plan. This was done with a clear idea in mind. According to Marcourt, "Given the terrible recent events, the recognition of Islam and its integration into the cultural landscape is an important social stake for our fellow Muslim citizens but also for the coexistence and democracy."[201]

The minister has a clear view on what the broadcast should entail. "It needs to be a program which makes sense and which recognizes the Muslims who are inclined to create an Islam in Belgium, so that it can also address non-Muslims."[202] Minister of equal opportunities Isabelle Simonis further adds that "It is the governments duty on the level of media to offer our citizens a view of the Muslim community which represents it in all its richness and not only through the excesses of some extremists."[203]

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[197] 18-03/04-12-15 Commission concernant la formation des cadres musulmans et les émissions concédées
[198] FWB PLEN 09-12-2015
[199] FWB COM HED 13-01-2015
[200] Loobuyck, Patrick, and Petra Meier. 2014.
[201] FWB COM HED 13-01-2015
[202] FWB COM HED 08-03-2016
[203] FWB COM HED 03-05-2016

While the debate concerning the public broadcast concession to the Muslim community was very much inscribed in the concern over radicalization and the problematized position of Islam in society, this link was absent in the Flemish debate. Media minister Sven Gatz abolished the television broadcasting for religious and philosophical channels all together in December 2015. A new agreement between the Flemish government and the Flemish public broadcast company (VRT) provides for an alternative. The VRT will create a new pluralist and interreligious television program which will encompass all religious and philosophical communities. Although religious organizations will be engaged with, the VRT has full autonomy in the creation of the prorgam.[204]

Strikingly enough, public broadcasts of religious services – predominantly Catholic – on Sunday will remain in place. As an explanation, minister Sven Gatz argues that the broadcasting of worshipping services is a public service, whereas the broadcasts organized by religious organizations are a conceded right.[205] The parliament seems divided on the matter. The liberals of Open VLD – of which Sven Gatz is member as well – prefer an abolishment of all religious broadcast on public television all together.[206] More conservative parties N-VA and CD&V are in favor of keeping the broadcast of religious services, and hope that the new to-be-created program will "afford the chance to the different religions present in our society to explain and clarify their interpretation."[207]

Multiculturalism in education and social work

The political efforts made to integrate Islam more actively in public media should therefore be understood in a broader attempt to accustom people about the diverse and multicultural nature

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[204] FL 08-07-2015 Resolution 426 on the new management agreement between the Flemish Radio and Television Organization (VRT) and the Flemish Community
[205] FL PLEN 13-01-2016
[206] FL COM CUL 25-06-2015
[207] FL COM CUL 25-06-2015

of society. Visibility in public media is therefore not the only area where authorities are trying to favor a pluralist and multiculturalist or intercultural approach. The issue of radicalization has also pointed to the need for more diverse and multicultural social services. Youth workers and teachers are often the first to notice a change in behavior of youngster, possibly pointing to an early stage of radicalization. It is said that social services and an education system which better reflect the diversity in society, would be better equipped to approach radicalizing youth.

First of all, this is done by raising awareness among youth workers and school staff about radicalization, but about Islam as well. This should equip social workers with more capacities to address questions related to cultural and religious diversity.[208] The FWB devised mobile mediation teams which can be used to train teachers in addressing questions of diversity and radicalism.[209] Such trainings should equip social workers not only with a knowledge about the phenomenon of radicalization, but also more broad knowledge "about Islam as a religion and culture, and about the geopolitical and socio-economic context which provides a breeding ground for the radicalization phenomenon that concerns us today."[210]

The resolution on counter-radicalization adopted in the Flemish parliament, urges the government to make work of a strong 'diversity policy' in order to improve the level of diversity among staff in the fields of education and social services. "More diversity provides recognizability and role models, creates the possibility of establishing trust relationships and can down barriers."[211] Concretely, this would mean attracting more employees with a migrant background. Although minister of welfare Jo Vandeurzen acknowledges the fact that the Flemish social services are still predominantly 'white', he remains rather vague about the ways

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[208] FWB 21-01-2015 Plan d'action pour la prévention du radicalisme et l'amélioration du vivre ensemble; FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalisation processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism
[209] FWB COM EDU 17-05-2016
[210] FWB COM YOU 17-03-2015
[211] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism

to alter this. He aims at an "interculturalization" of welfare services, by making them more sensitive on cultural and religious diversity. Awareness raising campaigns and capacity building are the main tools to achieve this. Quotas ore affirmative action measures are not debated.[212]

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[212] FL COM RAD 09-11-2015

Discussion

A Belgian Islam?

Many of the proposed counter-radicalization measures which incorporate the Muslim community as a partner, to varying degree include the idea of a 'Belgian' or 'European Islam'. This raises interesting questions regarding the relationship between religion and the state, and possibly problematizes the principles of secularism and freedom of religion. Before discussing these issues in larger detail, I first want to clarify what is actually meant when one speaks about a 'Belgian Islam'.

One of the most outspoken proponents of the creation of a Belgian or European Islam is the Francophone minister of higher education, research and media Jean-Claude Marcourt. In early 2015, he devised an expert committee to look into the possible "emergence of a modern and Belgian Islam; open, humanist and democratic."[213] According to Marcourt, "a Belgian or European Islam is an important leverage for social cohesion and an improved coexistence."[214] An Islam which inscribes itself in "the fundamental norms and values of democracy and the Enlightenment" can hereby play a decisive role in combatting the so-called 'imported Islam', "of which we can measure the consequences today."[215] Many of the measures taken by minister Marcourt, most notably in the field of education and imam formation, have already been

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[213] FWB 21-01-2015 Plan d'action pour la prévention du radicalisme et l'amélioration du vivre ensemble
[214] FWB COM HED 31-03-2015
[215] FWB COM HED 23-02-2016

discussed. An interesting decision is the creation of quota for female staff in in the management of local Muslim communities with the goal to balance the gender-equality.[216]

While the Francophone government is considerably active in facilitating the creation of a Belgian Islam, Flemish politicians seem more restrained on the matter. In the resolution on the prevention of violent radicalism adopted by the Flemish parliament in May 2015, MPs urge the government to "develop a positive attitude towards all initiatives taken to incorporate Islam in our European society." Although this request is rather vague, the MPs are more explicit about the role and scope such an Islam: "A Islam well-embedded in Flanders is not only the first dam against radicalization, but it should also be a logical fact in the intercultural society of today's Flanders. The societal framework in which Islam develops itself in Flanders, is that of western democratic values, such as the equality of men and women, the division of church and state and the respect for fundamental rights. These can not be questioned."[217]

Interestingly, the competent minister in Flanders Liesbeth Homans is more restrained than her colleague in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels to take active steps in the direction of the creation of a Belgian Islam. The main argument put forward is that the government is not competent in undertaking such measures, since the principle of division of church and state prevents it from doing so: "It is not up to me to flesh out the creation of a religion or to determine a strategy for its implementation. The government must however monitor the observance of fundamental rights and freedoms and the principles of the democratic rule of law by everyone, also by a religion and its ministers, whatever that religion may be. If one breaks the law, then action must be taken."[218]

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[216] FWB 07-12-2015 Plan Macourt pour la création d'un islam de Belgique
[217] FL 27-05-2015 Resolution 366 on the prevention of violent radicalism
[218] FL COM INT 02-02-2016

The separation of church and state

While the secular principle of the separation of church and state is supported by all politicians, the actual policies reveal a discrepancy between the Flemish and Francophone approach. From the part of the Flemish government, there is a degree of reluctance to actively incorporate Islam and the Muslim community in policies and state structures. Although Flanders has indeed taken steps to engage with Muslims, for instance through the creation of a network of Muslim experts or the professionalization of imam and Islam teacher trainings, the government seems to restrain from actively engaging with the creation of a European or Belgian Islam. Interestingly, even the Christian-democrats of CD&V – historically proponents of an active pluralistic approach to religious diversity – are not advocating fully for a more active state incorporation of Islam.[219]

On the other hand, calls for an 'islam de Belgique' rather than an 'islam en Belgique' – an Islam from Belgium rather than an Islam in Belgium – are most explicit in Francophone Belgium. In contrast to the Flemish debate, where the principle of church-state separation is often invoked, Francophone politicians seem less restrained from involving in religion related affairs. Especially when it comes to preventing radicalization, the state has to take its responsibility. This is exemplified by a quote by minister Jean-Claude Marcourt: "It goes without saying that I am deeply respectful of the separation of church and state. There can be no question for the state to interfere in religious matters, but the most recent events remind us, alas, that it is the responsibility of public authorities to encourage and support the emergence and recognition a modern Islam, humanist and democratic."[220]

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[219] FL COM INT 02-02-2016
[220] FWB COM HED 13-01-2015

A suspect community?

When it comes to the general framing of the Muslim community in political debates and policy documents, all governments are convinced that 'keeping on board' the Muslims is vital if counter-radicalization measures are to be successful. It is acknowledged that Muslims form an equal part of the Flemish, Francophone or Belgian society and that they should not be blamed for the wrongdoings of a few extremists.

In the Flemish parliament, all three governing parties urge for more 'dialogue' and cooperation with the Muslim community. Although several MPs point to the fact that this demand for more rapprochement is supported and even propagated by members of the Muslim community itself, at the same time it is the government who decides the terms of the debate, and who it wants to speak with. First of all, there are certain 'fundamental principles' which are undisputable: the equality between men and women, the division between church and state and the freedom of speech are a few. Secondly, it is the government who decides who it speaks with. N-VA urges for cooperation with key figures in the community who "speak the language of the real Koran." This feeds into the idea that there is a good vs. bad Islam and that there are 'trusted' and 'suspicious' Muslims, as in the 'suspect community' these.[221]

The idea that (a part of) Islam would be incompatible with "our norms and values," is for the first time mentioned by N-VA. "A minority of Muslims does not follow our norms and values. To go against this, we have to acknowledge this fact. We have to work together with the Muslim community to give a strong answer." On the one hand the party indeed stresses it does not want to demonize the whole Muslim community on the account of the wrongdoings of a few. On the other hand however, it argues that the 350 foreign fighters who left Belgium for Syria, "are merely a symptom of a much larger and more profound problem; namely the passive undercurrent of people who hold sympathies for for violent Islamism." By making such

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[221] FL PLEN 14-01-2015

statements, the idea of a Muslim 'suspect community' finds ground; all members of the community are potential (passive) sources of 'violent Islamism'.[222]

In spite of this rhetoric, the Flemish Action Plan on the prevention of radicalization is the only policy document which explicitly refers to the dangers of framing of 'Muslim radicalization'. The Plan calls for "great prudence" when it comes to using this term, stating that "This policy is not in the least aimed at a certain section of the population." And that "Muslims are often the first victims of the excrescences of terror and extremism in the name of Islam."[223]

That the framing of the Muslim community is politically a sensitive issue, can be shown by the controversy arisen from statements made by federal minister of interior affairs Jan Jambon. In the context of the continued search for terrorist suspect Salah Abdeslam in early 2016, the minister stated in a Dutch television interview that "the support for the terrorists in [Muslim] communities is larger than I had anticipated."[224] The statements created a certain amount of outrage in the Muslim community and among opposition parties, who lamented the stigmatizing nature of his statements. In the Committee on Interior Affairs, minister Jambon rebutted this criticism. He did not mean to say that there would be a support from the whole community and on the contrary he is convinced that "we have to embrace the large part of the Muslim community to work together in combatting terrorists and extremists." On the other hand, there has to be a certain support from a minority within the community. "This is not an accusation, this is not a stigmatization, but a simple fact."[225]

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[222] FL PLEN 14-01-2015
[223] FL 03-04-2015 Action plan for the prevention of radicalization processes that can lead to extremism and terrorism
[224] "De terrorismebestrijder van België: vicepremier Jan Jambon" (The terrorism fighter of Belgium: vice prime minister Jan Jambon) In *Buitenhof*, VPRO, 17-01-2016. http://www.vpro.nl/speel.POMS_VPRO_3032480.html
[225] FED COM IA 03-02-2016

Interestingly, the commotion concerning minister Jambon's statements did not stop there. In an interview with the Flemish daily De Standaard in April 2016, the minister stated that upon hearing the news of what had happened in Brussels, "a significant part of the Muslim community danced after the terrorist attacks."[226] Again confronted with his statements in the Interior Committee, Jambon reaffirmed his claim that he did not want to stigmatize a whole community but rather wants to cooperate with the Muslim community "to regain the hearts of these youngsters who are turning themselves away from our society."[227]

In general, the debates on radicalization and Islam were quiet nuanced and modest in all parliaments. However, it is striking that the most outspoken and polarizing statements were made by politicians on the federal level. This underwrites the hypothesis that the debate on the federal level is harsher towards Muslims partly because of the repressive nature of the policy competences of the federal government. On the other side, the call on the regional level 'to embrace the Muslim community' was louder, since much of the policies proposed to combat radicalization indeed needed the Muslim community as a partner.

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[226] "Dansen na de aanslagen. Stenen gooien naar de politie. Dát is het echte probleem" (Dancing after the attacks. Throwing stones at the police. That is the real problem) In *De Standaard*, 16-04-2016. http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20160415_02240440
[227] FED COM IA 20-04-2016

Conclusion

As a conclusion, I would like to answer the question whether the above analyzed counter-radicalization policies indeed can be considered a renewed rapprochement between the state authorities and representatives of the Muslim community and thus an improved multiculturalist accommodation of Islam in Belgium.

First of all, the relatively poor recent state of multiculturalist accommodation of the Muslim community in Belgium should be noted. While Islam is an officially recognized religion since 1974, because of Islamic influences from abroad, internal struggles in the MEB and a longstanding reluctance from the part of the government to actively engage with the Muslim community, much of the so-called multiculturalist framework for Islam has long remained neglected. Examples of this weak structural accommodation can be found in public education, the recognition of local places of worship and the formation of Muslim religious executives. While structures are in place, their actual implementation is poorly managed.

Therefore, the governments recent attention towards the Muslim community in the context of the attempt to combat violent radicalism, can indeed be considered a new rapprochement. However, this rapprochement should not be framed as an outright structural improvement of the multiculturalist accommodation of Islam in Belgium.

Indeed, interesting sub-national differences exist. While in the literature the Flemish approach to cultural and religious diversity is described as more corporatist and the Francophone one as more secularist, in this context the opposite is true. While Flanders shies away from meddling into religious affairs, arguing that the freedom of religion prevents them from taking active

steps in the reformation the Muslim community, Francophone politicians are more prone to contribute to the creation of a 'Belgian Islam'. This finding goes against the so-called 'Belgian cultural diversity policy paradox' as coined by Torrekens and Adam, which states that despite the presence of a stronger right-wing conservative political current, the Flemish approach to diversity has been more multiculturalist. A similar nuance should be given to the these by Adam, that the Flemish diversity policy would be more interventionist and the Francophone approach more 'laissez-faire'. In the above analysis, I find that the opposite, namely a more interventionist Francophone government and a Flemish government which is more reluctant towards engaging with the Muslim community.

Several hypothetical explanations can be given for this discrepancy between theory and practice. First of all, authors have long contended that one-sidedly characterizing Flanders as multiculturalist, incorporatist and interventionist does not fully account for the reality. In this regard, the observations made by Bousetta and Jacobs about the pragmatic Belgian approach to multiculturalism, and the characterization by Adam and Deschouwer of a Flemish approach combining multiculturalist and integrationist/assimilationist elements, are instructive. On the other hand, the current problematic relation between the governing Flemish political elite and Islam should be noted. The center-right wing government of Christian-democrats, moderate Flemish nationalists and liberals is considering religion more and more as a private matter in which the government should not interfere. This is supplemented with the by fact that Flemish nationalism has still not fulfilled the question about which place it gives to Islam in the Flemish national identity. The impact of the right-wing populist and Flemish nationalist party Vlaams Belang should not be underestimated in this regard. The center-left government in Francophone Belgium seems currently less constrained to engage with Islam, and since their stronger attachment to the federal state, are more inclined to delve into the creation of a 'Belgian Islam'.

The issue of a 'Belgian' or 'European Islam' brings me to another important point in the renewed rapprochement between the state and the Muslim community. It can indeed be argued that state authorities are considering the Muslim community and its elected representatives as interlocutors on religious. However, when it comes to a dialogue on integration, modernization and the fight against radicalization – topics which are officially not within the scope of the MEB – a more unbalances relation occurs. It is the government which decides the speaking terms. About certain fundamental rights such as the separation of church and state, gender equality and the freedom of speech can not be debated, even not in an 'interreligious dialogue'.

Moreover, the relationship between the creation of a Belgian Islam and multiculturalist accommodation is a complex one. While Flanders indeed restrains from actively contributing to the creation of such an Islam – contrary to the more interventionist approach in the FWB – on the other hand this Flemish approach reveals traces of a multiculturalist approach which leaves cultural and religious identity matters to be decided by the minority community itself. The attempt to create a Belgian Islam from the part of state authorities therefore bears some traces from an assimilationist approach which tries to get rid of cultural and religious difference under the veil of integration into a 'Belgian' or 'European' version.

The new rapprochement therefore has a contingent impact on the multiculturalist accommodation of Islam. The recent fervor the create a Belgian Islam might on the one hand indeed grant certain privileges to Muslims, but on the other hand can be considered as a paternalistic top-down process where it is again state authorities who demand certain things from a minority. In this regard, Joppke seems to be correct in arguing that state recognition of minority representative bodies always bears a degree of power-affirmation from the part of the state. It should be noted however, that the presumed backlash against multiculturalism as Joppke describes it, did not take place. In line with the findings of Burchardt and Michalowski, multiculturalist accommodation and religious rights for Muslims do not face a severe backlash

in recent years. The issue of radicalization, despite its often fierce discourse, did not alter this conclusion.

Let me now turn to the impact of securitization on the Muslim community. The principle of church and state separation precludes every form of state interference in the inner workings of local religious communities. The hands of politicians are tied when it comes to preventing radicalization inside mosques, for the simple reason that they cannot interfere in with them. Therefore, one of the only ways to assert a certain form of control over these places of worship, is through recognition. The call for more state recognition and supervision over mosque communities in Belgium has incorporated some of the elements described in the 'suspect community' these. Especially on the federal level, which holds the most relevant repressive competences, politicians distinguished between 'trusted' and 'suspicious' Muslims. But also in the Flemish parliament, MPs spoke about a 'potential undercurrent of violent extremists'. Such statements – even if partly based on evidence – might be counterproductive to the counter-radicalization goals they actually want to achieve.

With regard to the 'policed multiculturalism' these, I did not find traces about a co-optation of certain actors in the Muslim community to play a role in the policing of the own community. I however did find that similar to Ragazzi's findings, the counter-radicalization debate in Belgium casts the accommodation of the Muslim community often in a depoliticized security framework. The recognition of religuous communities is no longer the product of multiculturalism or the right to be recognized as equal, but put into a frame of security and necessary collaboration to combat terrorism. On the other hand, debate about the legitimacy of the MEB still exists, especially in Flanders. Some MPs therefore consider the possibility of alternative ways to deal with the Muslim community, although concrete proposals have not been fleshed out so far.

This brings me to the final element of the renewed rapprochement between the Muslim community and the state. The role of the Muslim Executive of Belgium as representative body of the whole Muslim community and prime interlocutor with the different governments has broadened in scope because of recent events. This is not to say that problems regarding its functioning and legitimacy still exist and will not go away soon. In this regard, the critique of Joppke and Modood on the unilateral state incorporation of one single representative body for a diverse religious community is justified. Since this same state is increasingly engaging itself in setting hallmarks for the MEB and pushing towards a modernization of the interpretation of Islam, conflicts will arise again. One possible danger lays in the fact that within the current 'securitized' framework, every dissident or conservative will quickly be denounced as 'radical' or 'extremist' and therefore preclude an open and democratic debate. Moreover, as mentioned by Loobuyck and Meier, if the government only turns to the Muslim community and its representatives on occasions when there is a threat of radicalization, this might raise suspicion and reluctance from the part of Muslims to cooperate with the state.

As a final remark, let me state that no miracles should be expected from this new rapprochement when it comes to preventing violent radicalism and terrorist threats. Certain aspects of the global terrorism issue are beyond the scope of regional, national and even European authorities. This however does not take away the fact that a good incorporation and accommodation of all diversity stemming from its citizens remains an important task for all state authorities in trying to create a peaceful and open society. This is on itself remains a huge challenge for the future.

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