

## IAPP Conference: Law and Religious Dialogue in Countering Radicalization

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IAPP held a conference at the European Parliament (EP), in the EP's administrative facilities in Brussels on December 5. The European Union is much larger and much more complex community of people than a single nation. Its governing structure is likewise more intricate. The EP is the highest authoritative body in the European Union, and that is the body with which various of our related organizations, UPF, IAPP, WFP, connected through this conference, out of which flowed thoughtful remarks and viewpoints on radicalism, a serious, deep-seated problem in Europe and elsewhere.

Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Flavio Zanonato hosted the event. Before becoming an MEP, he was mayor of the ancient city of Padua four times, was then on the Regional Council of Veneto for four years and was the Italian Minister of Economic Development.

The Women's Federation for World Peace and Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) jointly sponsored this conference, the theme of which was "Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Focus on Prevention." The concept underpinning the conference was that preventing radicalization requires the cooperative efforts of legislators and spiritual leaders. In the first of two sessions, political figures spoke on how to prevent radicalization and in the second, religious figures and social activists did.

### Session 1, the political aspect

Session one, which took place in the Altiero Spinelli Building on the European Parliament Mall had the theme "Pro-active policies of prevention for the prevention of radicalization: the role of parliamentarians." HRWF Deputy Director Lea Perekrests introduced MEP Zanonato. These are two excerpts from his opening remarks: "I am sure this will be a fruitful and interesting discussion, as I believe we are debating about one of the biggest challenges facing Europe (and not only Europe) in the last few decades. I want to thank all the experts that will speak today and all the guests for being here...."

"In July 2017, the European Parliament decided to set up a Special Committee on Terrorism. The remit of this Special Committee is both broad and demanding: the committee will consult with the main actors involved in the EU institutions and with national experts on counter-terrorism and with specialists in the prevention of radicalization.

"At the end of its mandate, the Special Committee will draw up a report containing proposals for submission to the Council and the Commission. I am not part of this committee, but I will follow closely its work. I believe that focusing only on the security aspects is counterproductive and worthless. In order to prevent radicalization we must create inclusive, more equal and less polarized societies. We need to fight racism and Islamophobia and work on all inequalities. Radicalization is a complex and dynamic phenomenon based on a series of global, sociological and political factors. It does not correspond to one single profile, and affects men, women and particularly young European citizens of all social origins, who share the common trait of feeling at odds with society."

### What has worked in a related area

A French lawyer and politician, Jean-Marie Bockel spoke next. He has been a government minister and has held other positions in government. At various times, he, too, was the mayor of an ancient city. He has been and currently is a senator in the government of France. What follows is an excerpt of his translated remarks from a section he described as "diagnostic work."

"We came to Brussels to meet the mayors of Vilvoorde and Molenbeek. Vilvoorde is the place from which dozens or even hundreds of jihadists came from, at one point. There we met the mayor, a man with hands-on experience, an educator by profession, surrounded by young academics, graduates and researchers to address the concrete and practical dimension, as well as to reflect on what was actually happening. I liked this approach, which was both hands-on and highly thoughtful. In one sentence: since realizing that they have a problem, most of their work is conducted house to house, apartment to apartment, to meet the families before problems arise. There has been a dramatic decline.



"I will not talk about Molenbeek, where the problem remains to be solved. Local solutions, when faced with radicalization, depend on the structure of the state, whether it is federal or centralized, but the local governments must be partners. I was mayor for twenty years of an Alsatian city, Mulhouse, and I was one of the pioneers of crime prevention policies and state-municipal partnerships on security. It was difficult to start with, because it was not in our culture; over the years, prevention and safety actions were co-produced. So I know that it is possible and it creates, between the local level and the representatives of the state -- the local police forces, schools and judges -- a climate of confidence which is then transmitted from generation to generation.

"I said to myself, basically, the prevention of radicalization is a more complex, sensitive issue. We already know how to work together on the classic issues of delinquency, so it should be

possible to put in place mechanisms in which local authorities can play a role in the case of radicalization. For example, in Sarcelles, where many communities live -- Jewish, Christian, Muslim -- [we implemented] a policy of sharing information, awareness, training of staff in contact with the citizens, youth radicalization prevention, the fight against dropping out of school and against the switch to private, confessional, unregulated schools that are quasi-Koranic, Salafist ones.

"In other places, including in a place in Burgundy, Chalon sur Saone, the town hall has formed a committee consisting of municipal officials to detect, from the outset, all of the weak signals they may encounter. In my region, in Colmar, the court officials in the Public Prosecutor's Department (namely the prosecutor and the judges) have put in place a mechanism for people who have not necessarily been convicted but are involved directly or indirectly in judicial proceedings potentially leading to their conviction.

They work in conjunction with very controlled social associations, allowing them to enter a process of de-radicalization early on. We have also seen initiatives for children returning from jihad. The hands-on presence of adults at the educational, social and associative level must be strengthened, prepared and adapted to fit these issues. There are entire regions of the country which no longer have any structures for young people, apart from the inward-looking Salafist ones."

### **Immersed in the community**

Mr. Karl-Christian Hausmann, head of UPF in Germany, also spoke during the first session. In addition to his work within our church, he has been an active participant in German politics. He led his local Trade and Commerce League (2000–2010) is a member of the Christian Democratic Party of Germany (CDU) and has been the local district Parliament leader and Speaker for his party. He was assistant chair of CDU Stuttgart (2012–2014), and currently serves on its Executive Board. What follows is an excerpt of his remarks: "Let us begin by reminding ourselves that the quest for peace and security is at the heart of the EU. The first political steps in Europe after 1945 were characterized by the desire for reconciliation and rebuilding trust and lasting peace between the peoples of Europe. The key actors of this time, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi and Robert Schuman shared this common vision. The reconstruction of Europe was intended as a Peace Union. The key words of the first treaties such as world peace, common destiny, solidarity or new trust were revolutionary at that time.

"Today, seventy-two years after the end of World War II, we can look back on possibly the longest relatively peaceful period of time we have ever had on this continent. We could even be satisfied with this and lean back, hoping it will continue like this forever.

"However, every period in history has its specific challenges that cannot be ignored and need to be addressed as we do here for example in this conference with the problem of "Radicalization and Violent Extremism" in Europe. There are more problems in our time that need answers and practical solutions: the problem of mass migration, the ongoing problem of extreme poverty and the essential importance of good governance, not only for governments, but for all sectors of society, including the non-governmental and educational sectors, to mention just a few.

"Parliamentarians are uniquely qualified to serve as advocates for peace and human development. As representatives of the people, they stand as mediators between government and civil society. Their experiences with the practical challenges related to law making and public policy give them a unique set of skills and insights that are required in building a world of lasting peace."



## Session 2, the religious aspect

"Awake, my soul! Awake O harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn!" (Psalm 57:8) The second session, with the theme, "Roots and Prevention of Radicalization: Religious Factors," began with harp music played by thirteen-year-old Solange Dellens. See [vimeo.com/247771304](https://vimeo.com/247771304) to hear it for yourselves. Robin Marsh, secretary general of UPF in the United Kingdom, moderated the session.

Lea Perekrests, a graduate of Connecticut College, in the US, works in Brussels as a human rights lobbyist for Human Rights Without Frontiers International, an NGO she is deputy- director of. Her presentation highlighted the difficulties involved in balancing the human rights of some religious leaders that the state perceives as being a societal threat. She spoke on the recent increase of politically motivated deportations of mainly Islamic leaders deemed to be extremists, (apparently) some of which HRWF is challenging through legal cases.

Today, I would like to share some of our preliminary research regarding a policy that being implemented by a number of European states: the deportation of problematic foreign religious leaders. Imams, other religious leaders and preachers have been arriving in Europe for as long as immigration to European states has existed. This phenomenon, however, has recently grown to pose a security concern or threat to national authorities as they see more Wahhabi/Salafists teaching doctrines and practices conflicting with national criminal laws and international human rights standards.

What European countries have distinguished is that they feel certain foreign religious leaders coming to their countries are preaching ideas that directly oppose their intended values. This is what has caused many countries to adopt policies surrounding what these religious figures can and cannot say.

The UK, Spain, Belgium, France and others have all experienced terrorist attacks in the past few years. These countries and others such as Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, and Italy, have actively deported or denied entry to religious leaders that they perceive as problematic.

In each country, the policy is slightly unique. To give a better picture on the process of deportation, let me begin by discussing a more detailed example that is currently playing out here in Brussels before giving an overview of how such policies play out in some of the aforementioned countries.

At the end of October, Belgium's House of Representatives published its fourth intermediary report of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on radicalism and terrorism....

Pointing to a few specific findings in the report, the Commission found that the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi strains of Islamic teachings exist in mosques in Belgium. The report claims that "the philosophy of the Muslim Brotherhood, which can be labeled "conservative," may cause some problems if there is any attempt to impose it on a society that is not historically Muslim and not homogeneous, as is the case in Belgium...."

When initiating the research behind this report, the commission first heard from Galaye N'Diaye, the imam of the Grand Mosque of Brussels, and Jamel Saleh Momenah, the director of the Islamic Center of Brussels, which is attached to the Grand Mosque. Both individuals denied being Wahhabis or Salafists.

The Imam claimed that he was preaching a moderate Islam. Other actors and experts heard by the commission shared a different view. Consensus among others is that the Islam promoted in the Grand Mosque of Brussels and the Islamic Center of Brussels is from the Wahhabi- Salafist current with a strong influence of the worldview of the Muslim Brotherhood....

On November 28, just last week, a Belgian court announced that it had struck down the effort to deport

the [an Egyptian imam with the Grand Mosque of Brussels] on the account of insufficient evidence. The court ruled that the evidence outlined in the commission's report, with the classified intelligence that we cannot obtain, was not enough to prove that [he] posed a threat to society.

Theo Francken [the Belgian state secretary for asylum and migration] has announced that he will appeal to the Council of State against this ruling. There have been other cases of deportation from Belgium in the recent past on the grounds of hate speech. Across Europe, we see successful and unsuccessful attempts.



#### **A conservative Muslim view**

"Most every day Muslims want to ride in a car under two years old, have twenty-five-year bank credits, watch reality TV shows and own the latest iPhone. Among them, indeed, some engage in a rediscovery of their faith.

I am from the generation that in the early 1990s rediscovered its faith. I must say that, far from the caricatures, for me, the rediscovery of my faith has been a strong element of integration, particularly

through my studies -- in the sense that we are children of immigrants and, for many of us, religious practice has allowed us not to be stuck in a process of cultural reproduction. That is to say, religious practice has inspired in us an awareness that has brought about a rupture in terms of social elevation compared to the working class generation of our parents.

"I, who have been a member for almost twenty-five years of the Union of Islamic Organizations of France, which is said to be close to the Muslim Brotherhood, have known, within this federation, only elements and trajectories of social success; indeed with a significant conservative leaning in societal terms. It is for this reason that I participated in the co-founding of "Manif pour tous," [Protest for All] which constituted the main opposition to same-sex marriage.

I am a conservative Muslim and have no reason to be embarrassed about it. In fact, I'm rather proud of it. "The fact that some mosques are open to homosexuals makes me very happy, because homosexuality is not a reason for religious excommunication.



So the caricature [of conservative Muslims] leads to a false diagnosis, not allowing a sick body to be healed efficiently. If we have a fantasized view of Muslims in Europe or the world, let us consider Muslims through the ideologized eye of progressivism which would like to make gender theory, homosexual marriage and euthanasia the new norms; I say no, I am neither for homosexual marriage, nor for gender theory, nor for euthanasia.

"On the other hand, I think that all religious currents, whether Muslim or not, must be able to

express themselves without being demonized.

Indeed, among Muslims, there are radical and violent elements. They must be eradicated -- zero tolerance. In the past, Protestants suffered from Catholic violence in France; Catholics have suffered from Protestant violence in Holland. Communist ideology has produced violence. Whether it is religion, philosophy or political theory, at some point, there will be elements of violence. Should we, however, caricature everyone because of these minority elements? Obviously not: 90 percent of the victims of terrorism are Muslim.

"Conservative discourse cannot be neutralized, especially one that considers marriage between a man and a woman as the norm, the family unit as the basis of society, and the masculine and feminine genders as differentiated. If this causes me to be called retrograde, dogmatic and fundamentalist, then so be it. I wish, with my Catholic friends in France, to go unnoticed...."

The audience response to these presentations mirrored what you have read here. Audience members, too, held diverse opinions and expressed them pointedly. According to Jacques Marion, they had "provocative comments or questions on religious extremism, the fate of Christian minorities in the Islamic world, or controversial family policies in Europe"