



During his French presidential campaign in 2017, then candidate Emmanuel Macron had promised that if elected he would tackle the fight against Islamism in his first 100 days in office. It took him actually three and a half years to deliver a landmark speech and a plan to deal with that thorny issue. While Macron said all the right things, including calling a spade a spade, the measures are not going far enough and some are likely not to be implemented, wrote Olivier Guitta in the *Levant News*.

President Macron wants to defend secularism against Islamist separatism and his government will present a law by the end of the year. That law will supposedly allow the dissolution of religious groups that 'attack the dignity of people, using psychological or physical pressure, and break the values of France'. Macron insisted 'no concessions' would be made in a new drive to push religion out of education and the public sector. An important measure is to stop foreign imams from coming to France: about 300 imams come each year from Turkey, Algeria, Morocco to preach in French mosques. Macron emphasized that it was necessary to 'liberate Islam in France from foreign influences,' naming countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. He announced that all French imams will be trained in France and would have to be certified from now on and could be kicked out at any time. In the past, the school that was training imams was controlled by the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

Another important measure is that community associations that receive state subsidies will have to sign a contract avowing their commitment to secularism and the values of France. Does one expect that the Islamists will stick to their word? For instance, the Muslim Brotherhood controls about 10% of all the mosques in the country but has also at least 600 associations. Therefore, it would make sense not only to shut down radical mosques but also the charities, sports clubs, cultural centers linked to the Islamists. Finally, Macron stressed that the measures did not seek to stigmatize or alienate France's Muslims but to bolster 'our ability to live together'. Interestingly, what made the headlines is Macron's statement that "Islam is in a crisis all over the world" because of "tensions between fundamentalism and political projects ... that lead to very strong radicalization."

Jumping on that remark, the al-Azhar University in Egypt described Macron's speech as "racist" and denounced his "accusations" against Islam. Another vocal critic of Macron's speech is none other than Muslim Brother Turkish President Erdogan, who asked: "Who is Macron to have the right to criticize Islam?".

One of the main challenges for France remains in schools. As early as 2004, a top French national education official, Jean-Pierre Obin, issued a groundbreaking report on the Islamization of French schools. The report was so explosive that French authorities that ordered it tried to bury it. The study included looking at 61 schools in 24 French departments (or States). The findings were damning: Obin reports, for instance, that Muslim students, asked their nationality, answer, "Muslim." When they are told that this is not a nationality and they are French, some insist that they can't be French since they are Muslim. Lots of Muslim pupils hailed Osama Bin Laden as their hero because in their eyes, he was the one who represented a conquering Islam winning over the West. Obin explained that France got to this point mostly because of a clear indoctrination orchestrated by international religious organizations. The students are since their young age taught what to think, what to believe and their regular teachers are presented as "liars". Also, Obin noted that "the project of these blatantly segregationist groups denouncing integration as an oppression" is to take these Muslims out of the French Nation and bring them instead into the "Muslim nation".

Regarding primary schools, the report cites flabbergasting examples: first graders boys refuse co-ed; Muslim kids refuse to sing, dance or draw a face; Muslim students refuse to use the sign "+" because it is the symbol of the cross.

Some canteens tables are also divided between Muslim and non- Muslim kids; during Ramadan-a whole month of fasting for Muslims- secular Muslim kids and sometimes even non-Muslims pupils are forced to follow it because of threats from fellow students. Muslim female students are victims of violence but also female teachers, whether Muslims or not. Jews are also major victims of Muslim violence.

Today, the situation has actually deteriorated and became much more widespread. As Obin recently noted, France lost 16 years when each government sat on his report and didn't do anything about the horrific situation of French schools. Interestingly, the only Prime Minister that recognized the worth of this report was Manuel Valls that declared after the terror attacks in Paris in January 2015 that nothing had been done to deal with the issues relating to Muslim extremism, pointed out by Obin.

"How did we let Islamism penetrate schools?" is the title of Obin's new book. In it, Obin cited new examples of incidents taking place in French schools: young Muslim boys refuse to hold hands with girls; Muslim kids refuse to enter a classroom painted in red, a color they view as "haram"; some Muslim parents are pressuring teachers not to read in class the "Three Little Pigs" story because it is haram according to what the imam told them.

In a primary school in the north, 9-year-olds were demonstrating in the playground yelling "Allah Akbar". In some preschools, toddlers had decided on taps in the bathroom reserved for Muslims and others for non-Muslims. Some Muslim schoolgirls refuse to visit churches because it is contrary to their religion. At least 1/3 of French teachers have reported similar incidents.

38% of teachers explain that they have faced contestation from the pupils when teaching topics like history or religion. Even more serious is that 37% of teachers have self-censored themselves to avoid conflict with the pupils. For example, in a high school two teachers decided not to teach American literature or talk about any topics linked to the U.S. This happened after pressure from the Muslim female representative of the pupils that described America as the Number 1 Enemy of Muslims.

Macron's challenge remains huge: how does one turn around a situation where 74% of French Muslims under 25 consider their religious values to be above those of the Republic? One answer might lie in Obin's conclusions: the schools that have fared the best in terms of radicalization are the ones where Muslim radicalism, violence towards girls, Jews and teachers have not been tolerated. In short, the only solution against the Islamists is being tough and not yielding on anything.

Olivier Guitta is the Managing Director of GlobalStrat, a security and geopolitical risk consulting company for companies and governments. Olivier tweets @OlivierGuitta