

EUROPEAN MONITORING CENTRE ON RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA  
OBSERVATOIRE EUROPÉEN DES PHÉNOMÈNES RACISTES ET XÉNOPHOBES  
EUROPÄISCHE STELLE ZUR BEOBACHTUNG VON RASSISMUS UND FREMDENFEINDLICHKEIT



**Anti-Islamic reactions in the EU**  
**after the terrorist acts against the USA**

**A collection of country reports from RAXEN**  
**National Focal Points (NFPs)**

**12<sup>th</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2001**

**LUXEMBURG**

**Association de soutien aux travailleurs immigrés (ASTI)**  
**Association for the support of immigrant workers**

Following the terror attacks in the USA on 11<sup>th</sup> September the EUMC found that there was a pressing need to closely follow the possible negative repercussions on racial and xenophobic attitudes and events in civil societies in Europe. On the basis of national reports drafted by its RAXEN network of National Focal Points (NFPs), the EUMC produced a first short-term report on anti-Islamic reactions in all countries of the European Union on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2001.

In order to have a longer term and regular monitoring on attitudes/incidents towards Muslim/Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups, the EUMC decided to follow up the first report and continue to closely monitor the situation at least until the end of the year 2001.

It therefore asked the RAXEN NFPs to produce additional reports, monitoring the situation on a monthly basis until the end of the year; in addition, it asked for a final report analysing the overall developments from 11<sup>th</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2001.

According to the EUMC request, the reports have addressed in particular the following issues:

- acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural or religious minorities (especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups or new types of victims), related to the recent terrorist attacks in the USA;
- good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence;
- reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends.

In addition to the summary report written on behalf of the EUMC by Prof. Nielsen and Mr. Allen of the University of Birmingham, the following pages contain the original reports submitted by each NFP for the whole period.

Not all reports have been made available from all countries, but the coverage is however complete. The reports are quite varying in size. It should be considered that the Member States have different systems in collecting data: some have implemented a rather elaborated and comprehensive approach, while others have done what they could to get information about the situation in the Member State.

The task of the RAXEN network is to collect reliable and comparable data (including examples of and models for “good practices”) at the European level on the phenomena of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in order to help the EU and its Member States to take measures or formulate courses of action. For further information please visit the EUMC homepage <http://eumc.eu.int>

Vienna, 23 May 2002

## **First short-term report**

### Verbal and physical attacks

In Luxembourg there is an Islamic community with about 5800 members.

In the press and on television, no violence attacks or discriminations were reported. Once a week, the Luxembourg's television does broadcast a special program, a TOP-THEME about a current event. Since the 11 September, the Luxembourg's television (RTL) broadcasted twice a report on the Islamic community of Luxembourg. The Islamic community got a lot of attention since a few days, people are interested in who is this community.

However, no facts appeared about violence, discrimination or racist acts on this community. ASTI itself didn't hear anything about violence or attacks, and no other NGO reported on something known by them.

### Attitudes

There is the impression that the fear of possible racist acts exists in Luxembourg.

Luxembourg's television contributes to calm it down and especially wants to prevent these risks, by bringing more information on the community and by trying to clarify the difference between some terrorists and the people who have the same religion than the possible criminals. This contributes to the fact that Luxemburgers feel more comfortable with this community and diminishes the risks of racist attitudes towards it.

20<sup>th</sup> September 2001

**Report on anti-Islamic and anti-Arabic reactions**  
**after the terrorist acts in the USA –**  
**Reactions from 25<sup>th</sup> September to 19<sup>th</sup> October**

According to the Islamic Cultural Center of Luxembourg, the community of practicing Muslims in Luxembourg is formed by about six thousand persons.

Mid of the seventies, Luxembourg counted about three hundred Muslims. At the beginning of the nineties, they were already about three thousand, ten times more in less than twenty years. In the few last years, the community grew about the double due to the asylum seekers from Ex-Yugoslavia. These persons often stay only two or three years, and then they have to go back to ex-Yugoslavia. From these 6000 registered practicing Muslims, 65 % come from the former Federative Republic of Yugoslavia; 1900 persons from Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1800 from Montenegro.

It's important to specify that in Luxembourg no Mosque exists, it is replaced by a Cultural Center, which serves as a praying room.

- **Acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural, religious minorities (especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups or new types of victims), related to the recent terrorist attacks in the USA**

In Luxembourg, physical aggressions are rather rare. Luxembourg's model is: you don't interest yourself for another culture, but at least you are tolerant. This model seems to be effective. The imam of the Islamic Cultural Center says that he didn't hear about violence acts, neither about aggressions towards his community.

This doesn't mean that there are no changes at all in attitude, only no physical attacks were done. This phenomenon could partly be explained by the fact that Luxembourg wants to keep the good image of a peaceful and tolerant country. Also, Muslims are well integrated and not seen as different. This phenomenon could also be explained by the fact that in Luxembourg, no visible element of the Islam exists. For example, in Luxembourg, there is no typical Mosque and women who wear a veil in public are rather rare.

The only aggression that took place after the 11th of September toward Muslim community, and known by us was the following happening on the Luxembourg's TV channel:

Luxembourg's television, which presented a few days after the terror attacks, a special broadcast about the Muslims in Luxembourg. They interviewed Saleem Shaikh, speaker of the Islamic Culture Center. He presented his community and explained that he doesn't feel that there is a change in attitude towards Muslims in Luxembourg. After the broadcast, RTL got three anonymous calls: According to the chief editor of RTL (Radio Television Luxembourg) these calls were about lowest racist level. At the same time he says that these calls are absolutely not representative of the present public opinion about Muslims and that they shouldn't receive too much attention.

Apparently some kids were insulted by their classmates for being "nasty Arabs", but we give these information without any details or sources.

Representatives of the Islamic Cultural Center of Luxembourg, asked by Asti, do not think that the opinion about their community has changed a lot since the 11<sup>th</sup> of September. They

said that Luxembourg has always been more tolerant than his neighboring countries thanks to its multiculturalism. They think that with the help of Luxembourg's authorities and social interlocutors they could present to the non-Muslims in Luxembourg that the Islam is a religion which helps the human to live in peace.

- **Good practices for reducing prejudice, violence and aggression:**

Halil AHMETSPAHC, the Imam of the Islamic Cultural Center is an Islamic theologian from Sarajevo. Since four years, he is the chairman of the Islamic Cultural Center. He was present during the ecumenical Mass for the victims, hold on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September in the capital cathedral. He prayed for peace and tolerance. He informed that according to the Koran, a person who kills someone without a reason is going to be killed by all the others. *"Terrorists cannot be believers, believers cannot be terrorists"* he said in English to close his dialogue, like this everyone could understand him.

In an interview on RTL radio, Servet OCAKTAN of the Islamic Cultural Center explained that the Islamic Cultural Center has always had a policy of openness. He proposed that persons who are interested in knowing the Islam, can contact them and are always welcome to visit the Center. They are ready to expound their religion and to take part at conferences to debate the religion. He thinks that it is important to open the discussion and to confront people by searching the dialogue. Not everyone knows very well the foundations and ideas of the Islam, that's why it is so important for them to openly show their religion. He wants his religion to be understood and tolerated.

From the side of non-Muslims, some initiatives were taken to reduce and prevent racism. For example special broadcasts on Luxembourg's television, which were shown after the attacks. Special reports and articles appeared in newspapers and magazines, to inform about Islam and the difference between Muslims and terrorists.

These practices helped to reduce prejudice and prevent violence and aggression.

- **Reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends;**

The 10<sup>th</sup> of July 1998 a law was passed to encourage the development of different religions in Luxembourg. This law concerned roman-catholic church, the Israeli community and the Greek-orthodox church. It excluded one religion: The Islam.

The Muslim community appeared reinforced in media. Rare are journals, newspapers and magazines or a television channel, which do not speak about the Islam. Imam Ahmetspahic think this phenomena is positive, but thinks it would still have been better if it would already have happened before the 11<sup>th</sup> of September.

The media interest that concerns at the moment the Islam could perhaps bring more interest and more understanding for the community. These days, the Imam got for the first time an invitation for a speech about his religion in a public school: Possible that these wouldn't have happened without the crisis after the attacks from 11<sup>th</sup> of September.

**Report on anti-Islamic and anti-Arabic reactions**  
**after the terrorist acts in the USA**  
**covering events from 19<sup>th</sup> October – 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2001**

Since the previous report on 19<sup>th</sup> of October no other act of violence has become known in Luxembourg.

Still, some insults took place, especially between classmates at school. In a highschool, a luxemburgish schoolboy insulted a Muslim schoolmate. The parents of the Muslim boy asked to get an excuse, and the luxemburgish child did his excuses to his classmate.

The archbishop organized together with the Ministry for National Education and the Islamic Culture Center a schoolprogram with the objective to give the pupils the possibility to learn more about the Islamic religion and to better understand it. Mr. Ocaktan, member of the board of the Islamic Culture Center was then invited by different teachers to come to the schools and explain in a very easy way the meaning of Islam. He explained the common points with the Christendom and he illustrated the principal points of the Islam.

Mr. Ocaktan told us that the reactions of the children usually follow the same pattern: they are distrustful and anxious during the first five minutes, but become really interested and impressed afterwards. The parents have the possibility to give their reactions to the teacher after the visit of Mr. Ocaktan, but apparently until today, there was no reaction at all, neither a good, nor a negative one. (article TELECRAN)

The luxemburgish television showed this good practice on the 20<sup>th</sup> November, an article about these schoolvisits was published in a luxemburgish weekly journal on 21<sup>st</sup> on November and in a daily newspaper on 23<sup>rd</sup> of November.

ASTI has a documentation Center that contains a rather large collection of books about the Islam. According to the person that runs this documentation Center, since a few weeks, the lending of these books rose.

Except this, no special attention was given to the Islamic Community, neither did the television reported anything about it, nor newspaper or other media institutions published any articles. The situation seems to be very calm.

Two radio stations included an interview with our NFP in their program, to know what happened in Luxembourg since the 11<sup>th</sup> of September. This was first the Radio LATINA and secondly the socio-cultural radio.

But still there seems to be some discriminations, visible changes in attitude towards Muslims. Mr. Ocaktan told us for example that in the past time, he has more difficulties than before to get rooms for their pray, rooms they have to rent from other organizations.

Another incident happened around mid-November:

A Pakistani Cultural Organization existing since many years in Luxembourg had planned long time ago to organize a Pakistani evening with music and dance and typical food.

A few days before the planned event, the town council told them to cancel everything. Their explanation was that due to the international situation, it would be better to program the event for springtime.

It is important to notice that only two weeks after the planned Pakistani evening, an Indian organization, celebrating its 10th anniversary, organized an Indian week, with many events: traditional dances, music, food, expositions, films, ... This event, contrary to the Pakistani evening, was not cancelled.

Apart from this incident, no other one has been noticed.

This phenomenon of absence of violence acts and very few incidents or insults has to be explained by the fact that the multicultural and pluralistic society in Luxembourg only allows little intolerance. It is also important to know that Muslims in Luxembourg are really well integrated, and even the Muslim asylum seekers, who have not been so long in Luxembourg, are on their way to integration. The economic situation of Luxembourg surely has a big effect on the fact that there are not too many problems concerning intolerance or even violence.

**Final Report on anti-Islamic and anti-Arabic reactions**  
**after the terrorist acts in the USA**  
**September – December 2001**

The exact number and the nationalities of Muslims living in Luxembourg in February 2001<sup>1</sup>

|                          |      |
|--------------------------|------|
| Bosnia-Herzegovina       | 2366 |
| RFY (Montenegro, Serbia) | 1700 |
| RFY (Kosovo)             | 1500 |
| Maroc                    | 300  |
| Turquie                  | 299  |
| Albania                  | 248  |
| Luxembourg               | 190  |
| Tunisia                  | 156  |
| Iran                     | 145  |
| Algeria                  | 124  |
| Macedonia                | 50   |
| Pakistan                 | 42   |
| Bangladesh               | 39   |
| Egypt                    | 32   |
| Malaysia                 | 27   |
| Senegal                  | 24   |
| Côte d'Ivoire            | 20   |
| India                    | 18   |
| Indonesia                | 15   |
| Iraq                     | 15   |
| Maurice                  | 15   |

<sup>1</sup> SHAIKH Saleem, « Musulmans vivant au Grand-Duché de Luxembourg selon leur pays d'origine », février 2001, Luxembourg (Saleem SHAIKH est membre du Centre Culturel Islamique du Luxembourg)

|                        |             |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Great Britain          | 12          |
| Ghana                  | 12          |
| Syria                  | 12          |
| Italy                  | 9           |
| Afghanistan            | 8           |
| Cameroon               | 8           |
| Kazakhstan             | 8           |
| Portugal               | 8           |
| Somalia                | 8           |
| Benin                  | 7           |
| Libyan                 | 7           |
| France                 | 6           |
| USA                    | 5           |
| Mongolia               | 5           |
| Azerbaijan             | 4           |
| Tchad                  | 4           |
| Gabon                  | 3           |
| Belgium                | 2           |
| Cap-Vert               | 2           |
| Ouzbékistan            | 2           |
| Comoros                | 2           |
| Germany                | 1           |
| Fiji                   | 1           |
| Jordanie               | 1           |
| Libya                  | 1           |
| Surinam                | 1           |
| Undetermined countries | 542         |
| Without nationality    | 230         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>7464</b> |

Islam is not legally recognized in Luxembourg.

As far as Luxembourg residents' feelings are concerned, an interesting poll was carried out, about the future of Luxembourg inhabitants. Among the questions there were also some about terrorism, the USA and their allies' actions in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: «What are you most afraid of, about this war?»

ANSWER: Chemical and biological weapons, first of all, then bombing in public places and problems with **Afghan refugees**.

Women are more worried about it than men: 78% women/ 68% men

QUESTION:

«Do you fear that war could become a general war against Islam?»

ANSWER: YES: 59%. Women 66%, men 52% - Luxemburgers 55%, Portuguese 74%

As Victor WEITZEL (member of the EUMC Management Board) mentions in its article: «*A positive future, although we are anxious*», published in the «QUOTIDIEN» of January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002, this question asks in turn for others:

“Do we want to know whether interfering in Afghanistan could lead Islamic countries to react? Or, do we only want to suggest that the USA should be more careful not to offend Muslims all over the world, thus challenging them to react? (...) Anyway, the question that is set is the following one: are we to indulge in fantasy, for the sake of cultures, if we completely forget that Islam is no longer an extra-European or extra-American phenomenon? Luxembourgers reacted fairly moderately, unlike our Portuguese friends, still strongly influenced by Catholicism. Let’s hope that this kind of unwise questions don’t lead, by the method of about “self-fulfilling prophecy”, to those islamophobe behaviors which would be a shame on our open society“.

Seleim SHEIKH, the spokesman of the Islamic Cultural Center, paid attention to any incident or phenomenon, which appeared after Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> concerning the Muslim community. But for a few discrimination actions he heard of, without any proof, he told us that the Islamic Cultural Center was unaware of any such incident. Yet, Mr. SHEIKH makes it clear that the media could have helped more against the mixture between Islam and terrorism and could have made more prevention.

Servet OCAKTAN, a member of the Board of Directors of the Islamic Cultural Center, makes it clear that it does not seem to be a problem in Luxembourg, because the population is very tolerant and, what is even more important, clear-sighted.

The school commission for religious teaching in primary schools thinks that it is very important for children to talk about what they saw on TV on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Yet, they are of the opinion that a wrong image of Islam is carried on, and that fundamentalism, terrorism and Islamic faith are melt in the same pot. Children do need an explanation, therefore the commission asks the religion teachers to explain all about Islam. They wish, too, that children are made aware of the common roots of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The commission also wishes the religion teachers would contribute to a respectful interaction between religions all over the world. In Luxembourg, Christians and Muslims live next door to each other without knowing that the other exists. Comprehension, respect and tolerance could only be found if we came to know each other.

Servet OCAKTAN lectured about Islam several times in Luxembourg schools. Teachers and pupils both had positive reactions. Although some hesitated, and put forth questions rather based on curiosity, such as, for example: «Shall we have to wear a bulletproof jacket?» - children were fascinated by Mr. OCAKTAN’s information. Moreover, Mr. OCAKTAN asked the teachers to tell him about the parent’s reactions, after he had met their children. We are glad to say that there was no negative reaction.

No new incidents were reported.

As a conclusion we can say that the accent is done on prevention of mixing-up between Islam and terrorism, and this especially in the area of education.

**Acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural, religious minorities, especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups or new types of victims, related to the recent terrorist attacks in the USA:**

- a few anonymous racist calls received by the luxemburgish television after a broadcast about the Muslim community in Luxembourg
- some incidents in school classrooms (Luxemburgish children who insulted Muslim classmates)
- a Pakistani Cultural Organization existing since many years in Luxembourg had planned long time ago to organize a Pakistani evening, with music and dance and typical food. A few days before the planned event, the town council told them to cancel everything. Their explanation was that due to the international situation, it would be better to program the event for springtime. (An Indian event, planed only for a few weeks after was accepted without problem)

**Good practices for reducing prejudice, violence and aggression:**

- The Imam of the Islamic Culture Center was present during the ecumenical Mass for the victims, hold on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September in the capital cathedral. He prayed for peace and tolerance. He informed that according to the Koran, a person who kills someone without a reason is going to be killed by all the others. "*Terrorists cannot be believers, believers cannot be terrorists*" he said in English to close his dialogue, so that everyone could understand him.
- In his interview on RTL radio, Servet OCAKTAN proposed that people interested in knowing the Islam should contact the Islamic Culture Center for a visit. He thinks that it is important to open the discussion and to confront people by choosing dialogue.
- From the side of non-Muslims, some initiatives were taken to reduce and prevent racism. For example special broadcasts on luxembourgish television which were shown after the attacks.
- Special reports and articles appeared in newspapers and magazines, to inform about Islam and the difference between Muslims and terrorists.

**CONCLUSION**

No physical attacks were made, which does not mean that there was no changes in attitude towards the Muslim community.

This phenomenon could partly be explained by the fact that Luxembourg wants to keep the good image of a peaceful and tolerant country. Also, Muslims are well integrated and not seen as different.

This phenomenon could also be explained by the fact that in Luxembourg, no visible elements of the Islam exist. For example there is no typical Mosque, women who wear a veil in public are rather rare.

This phenomenon could also be explained by the prevention done in Luxembourg. It was well organized and effective for the Luxembourgish population. The multicultural and pluralistic society in Luxembourg allows only little intolerance. It is also important to know that Muslims in Luxembourg are really well integrated, and even the Muslim asylum seekers, who have not been for so long in Luxembourg, are on their way towards integration. The economic situation in Luxembourg surely has a big effect on the fact that there are not too many problems concerning intolerance or violence.

The Muslim community appeared reinforced in media. Rare are journals, newspapers and magazines or television channels which do not speak about the Islam. Imam Ahmet Spahic thinks this phenomenon is positive, but thinks it would have been even better if it had already happened before the 11<sup>th</sup> of September.

The present media interest for Islam could perhaps bring more interest and more understanding for the Muslim community.

The increase of interest for the Islamic religion could also be detected in ASTI, where there is a documentation center that contains a rather large collection of books about the Islam and where the lending of these books rose since the 11<sup>th</sup> September.

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