

Counter-Islamophobia Kit

Workstream 2: Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia- Belgium

Dr Elsa Mescoli

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Working Paper 18

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Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States.

CIK Project (Counter Islamophobia Kit)

Dr Elsa Mescoli

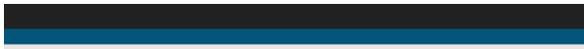
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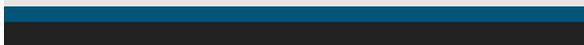
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Counter-Islamophobia Kit



About the CIK Project

The *Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States* (Counter Islamophobia Kit, CIK) project addresses the need for a deeper understanding and awareness of the range and operation of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred across the EU, and the extent to which these counter-narratives impact and engage with those hostile narratives. It is led by Professor Ian Law and a research team based at the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, UK. This international project also includes research teams from the Islamic Human Rights Commission, based in London, and universities in Leeds, Athens, Liège, Budapest, Prague and Lisbon/Coimbra. This project runs from January 2017 - December 2018.

About the Paper

This paper is an output from the second workstream of the project which was concerned to describe and explain the discursive contents and forms that Muslim hatred takes in the eight states considered in the framework of this project: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and United Kingdom. This output comprises eight papers on conditions in individual member states and a comparative overview paper containing Key Messages. In addition this phase also includes assessment of various legal and policy interventions through which the European human rights law apparatus has attempted to conceptually analyse and legally address the multi-faceted phenomenon of Islamophobia. The second workstream examines the operation of identified counter-narratives in a selected range of discursive environments and their impact and influence on public opinion and specific audiences including media and local decision-makers. The third workstream will be producing a transferable EU toolkit of best practice in the use of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred. Finally, the key messages, findings and toolkits will be disseminated to policy makers, professionals and practitioners both across the EU and to member/regional audiences using a range of mediums and activities.

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Contents

- 1. Introduction..... 5**
- 2. Methodology..... 5**
- 3. Background: the formation of counter-narratives to Islamophobia..... 7**
- 4. Categorical list of most dominant counter-narratives to Muslim hatred..... 10**
- 5. Conclusion 49**
- 6. References..... 51**
- 7. Appendices 53**

1. Introduction¹

This report introduces a first analysis of the fieldwork material collected through ethnographic research conducted in Belgium on the counter-narratives to Muslim hatred. The aim is to provide with a description of best practices implemented to fight Islamophobia in the country thanks to the mobilisation of tools and messages aimed at reversing the racist discourse and practice affecting Muslims.

The report is structured as follows. First, the methodology employed to collect data and to organize it analytically will be detailed in a devoted section. Then, the counter-narratives to Muslim hatred developed in Belgium will be described through classifying them on the basis of the narratives of hatred to which they respond². After some concluding remarks, the list of the research participants of this study, the list of attended events and the list of the mentioned acronyms are provided as annexes.

2. Methodology

While the research report on the narratives of Muslim hatred in Belgium has been realized mainly on the basis of literature and press review, to which the results of previous empirical research have been integrated, this report on the counter-narratives to Muslim hatred in Belgium is essentially based on fieldwork activity conducted between April and November 2017. The research participants have been reached by resorting to previously established contacts working to counter Islamophobia and racism, and to their networks. A further mapping of Muslim associations in Belgium let the researcher identify other social actors dealing with issues that could be connected indirectly to the object of study in terms of possible inputs to the development of narratives aimed at countering stereotypes on Muslims and at proposing counter-images to these.

The duration of the research activity and the enduring presence in the field, as well as the lasting contact with the research participants, has enabled the researcher and author of this report to enter the group of social actors dealing with Islamophobia in Belgium, thus allowing to interview them but also, in some cases, to participate to and observe their activities. This was the case for example of two main civil society organisations active in this domain, such as the Collective against Islamophobia in Belgium (hereafter CCIB) and the European Network Against Racism (ENAR)³.

Semi-structured interviews focused on the role of the actor involved and/or on that of the organisation to which he or she was affiliated in countering Islamophobia directly, when this was among the exerted activities, or indirectly, i.e. in the cases of associations working on connected subjects, as already

¹ This report has been written by Elsa Mescoli, anthropologist, post-doctoral researcher at the Centre for Ethnic and Migration studies of the University of Liege (CEDEM, e.mescoli@uliege.be), on the basis of her own fieldwork activity. Hassan Boussetta (CEDEM, hassan.boussetta@uliege.be) contributed to fieldwork activities through advices.

² This point will be better explained later.

³ More precisely, it was possible to participate to strategic meetings of both associations. Among similar other fieldwork activities is the participation to a training session on gender based discrimination (“Muslim women fight back”) organized by the Belgian section of KARAMAH (Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights) and to a networking event of the Belgian Association of Muslim professionals (ABPM). Part of the information collected during these initiatives will not be included in this report for confidentiality reasons, even if it indirectly contributes to feed the overall analysis and reflection and to get deeper insight on the activities of each concerned association.

mentioned above. Following the ethical guidelines associated with the project⁴, the names of the research participants will not be anonymized in this report, since they will be referred to as key stakeholders in the issue under study, unless the interviewee explicitly asked to make part of his or her statements anonymous – or if this was implicitly discerned by the researcher. ‘RP’ beside the reported quotations refers to the list of research participants and meeting dates annexed to the text. This list does not include some informants that would have been worth including because, in spite of repeated attempts, it was not possible to reach them. Among these actors was the Executive of Muslims in Belgium, the official interlocutor between Muslims and the state in Belgium⁵.

As for the locations covered throughout fieldwork, they include both some Walloon cities such as Liège and Verviers and some Flemish cities, such as Hasselt, Antwerp, and Ghent⁶. Besides covering these two regions, most of the research activities in terms of interviews and participant observations have been conducted in Brussels, where it was interesting to observe different levels of intervention – at times overlapping or interlocking, at times proceeding in parallel but without specific inter-dialogue – of the actors involved with the issue of Islamophobia. In fact, the geographical territory of Brussels corresponds to the political location of the European institutions, of the Federal government and of the Regional (Brussels-Capital) administration. In Brussels, as Julie Pascoet (ENAR) explains: “[b]est practices circulate better. CCIB for example, for the fact that they are based in Brussels, they have better access to the Commission, this can impact their work, their engagement, and their work can engage more the Commission too”⁷ (RP23, 31/5⁸). Brussels was the city where most of the local organizations active in this domain exert their actions, or where they are based – thus centralizing in this locality the management of overall activities, even if operated elsewhere in the country. The overlapping of these levels of intervention is manifest in advocacy actions involving both local sections of international organizations and local associations that are frequently addressed to the European

⁴ Each participant signed a consent form.

⁵ See working paper 1.

⁶ This means that social actors active in these cities have been reached and interviewed by the researcher in their respective locations or in seminars or meetings organized elsewhere and gathering a geographically broader range of participants.

⁷ All quotes from interviews, seminars or other meetings were originally in French and have been translated by the author, unless this is differently specified in footnote.

⁸ See the list of research participants in annex for details on the interview. Dates are indicated in the text only when meetings are multiple, as in this case.

Commission and the European Parliament⁹. Or else, internationally organized events may be actively attended by local associations¹⁰.

In Brussels, it was also possible to interview or explore the work of key stakeholders active in politics and in the media domain, such as politicians, journalists, YouTube personalities and bloggers. The analysis presented in this report will take into account both the information collected through interviews or other direct exchange and the information drawn from the material produced by the research participants.

3. Background: the formation of counter-narratives to Islamophobia

The emergence of narratives – meant as discourse and practices – aimed at countering Islamophobia occurred in a context that promoted secularisation and where anti-racist discourse lacked attention to discriminations linked to religious belonging (RP70, 7/10). Recognizing Islamophobia as fact and not only as notion – and about this point, some actors stress the need to overcome the debate on the use of this term in order to focus on concrete actions to counter the discrimination of Muslims (regardless of the way of calling it¹¹ – permitted to act against it). The positioning of Unia in 2008 in this debate played a crucial role in this process. At least since then, monitoring Islamophobic acts was more effective and it permitted the development of measures to counter specific forms of discrimination. Anyway, some actors including Farida Tahar (*Parti socialiste*, PS hereafter) stress the need of an overt political recognition of Islamophobia at the federal level to improve these monitoring and measures: “politics should recognize, as it did for other forms of racism, Islamophobia, and once we have a [specific] legal framework, we would better measure this phenomenon and better fight it” (RP28, 14/6). Recalling the proposal of law to recognize Islamophobia that she co-signed in 2013¹², Zakia Khattabi (Green Party, Ecolo hereafter) explains that this was for her a means to

⁹ For example, the event organized on 27 January 2016. On that occasion, FEMYSO (Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations) “met with David Friggeri (see later), and with the new appointed special representative of Muslim communities of the group Social & Democrats of the European Parliament. The aim of the meeting was to bring organisations working on Islamophobia on the table with both the European Commission and the European Parliament to discuss the most effective way to move forward on the issue of Islamophobia” (FEMYSO 2016 report, p. 19, available from <http://femyso.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Femyso-annual-report-2016.pdf>, accessed 24 October 2017). Other similar advocacy meetings are included among the actions of the “EU High Level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance” of the European Commission, opened to some national associations and NGOs and established after the 2015 EU Fundamental Rights colloquium focusing on Antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred (RP23, 31/5). At the level of the European Parliament, cooperation between NGOs is established through the actions of the ARDI (European Parliament anti-racist and diversity intergroup) and its coordinator Alfiaz Vaiya. Other working groups based at the European Institution may be reached – mainly through ENAR – to deal with specific issues, such as gender.

¹⁰ For example, the “European Action Day Against Islamophobia” held on 21 September 2017 and organized by the European Platform “no Hate Speech Movement” has been actively supported by the CCIB.

¹¹ Mustapha Chairi stresses the fact that “lot of energy is lost on semantics, rather than on the defense of human rights” (RP70, 8/10). Zakia Khattabi affirms: “It annoys me that we avoid the question through a lexical debate, [...] we can use another name but there is a reality that exists and that we cannot deny. Because of this name of Islamophobia... it allows not to deal with the fundamental issue that is the discriminatory experience that today a section of Belgian population live [...]” (RP32, 13/10).

¹² See WP1 report. This proposal was object of controversial debate in particular in the French-speaking regions of the country, while it did not raise particular polemics in Flanders (RP32).

“[d]raw attention to a reality. For me Islamophobia is the fear of Islam, [...] people fear Islam and this has a certain number of behaviours as a consequence. [...] there is a reality that takes important proportions also connected to the international context. [...] [The use of the notion of Islamophobia] is one of the best ways to show that it is linked to religion and that it is not only a move from [ethnic] racism toward a phobia.” (RP32, 13/10).

The reluctance of Belgian federal politics to include the treatment of Islamophobia in their agenda goes together with the difficulty faced by those who wish to promote this to express themselves:

“From a political point of view, today it’s very difficult to have a counter-discourse, [...] we can denounce the discriminations linked to this belonging, immediately it is said that we close our eyes to terrorism, while there is no link. [...] and it is even more difficult when you have the origins that I have¹³. [...] when I speak out on that debate, I am immediately assigned an identity, while people do not know anything about my life. It is very complicated today at the political level to have a counter-discourse [...].” (RP32).

Unlike at the federal level, in the 2014/2019 Government agreement for the Brussels-Capital region¹⁴ Islamophobia is cited among the forms of discrimination to counter, fact which, as the Brussels MP Mahinur Ozdemir explains,

“enables deputies to [...] put questions to the different ministers through citing the issue of Islamophobia. [...] Brussels authorities realise that there is a phenomenon [of Islamophobia], we talk about this, but in terms of actions it does not move forward for the moment [...] compared for example to the fight against homophobia or against antisemitism [...]. [...] we need a policy of zero tolerance with regard to all these phenomena” (RP25).

Among the measures adopted by the Brussels Parliament to fight discrimination involving directly or indirectly Muslims we find the situation testing for employment discrimination¹⁵ approved after research and concertation among several actors concerned within the political sphere¹⁶ and the civil society sphere.

The segmentation of Belgian state power into a variety of governmental institutions and of politics competences attributed to each to manage societal issues makes it difficult to establish a clear framework of reference to deal with Islamophobia as it deploys concretely at various levels of everyday life. Contradictions emerge because of the lack of a clear positioning on Islamophobia by the federal state, i.e. “a strong word, political or other, once and for all [...] [that] engages with the existence of this reality and brings it to the public debate” (RP32)¹⁷. To give an example, despite the above

¹³ She means Moroccan origins.

¹⁴ <http://pouvoirs-locaux.brussels/fichiers/accord-de-majorite-reg-fr.pdf>, accessed 10 November 2017.

¹⁵ The declaration of the president of the Brussels-Capital region Rudi Vervoort on this issue is available from: <http://www.parlement.brussels/declaration-de-politique-generale/?term=discrimination%20emploi>, accessed 20 November 2017.

¹⁶ Zoé Genot (Ecolo) strongly promoted and supported the implementation of the initiative. The 2015 proposal from which the process started focused on the need to protect workers with foreign origins from discrimination at hiring and mentioned people with Turkish or Maghrebi origins as particularly affected by the exclusion from the labor market (see <http://weblex.irisnet.be/data/crb/doc/2014-15/127224/images.pdf>, accessed 20 November 2017).

¹⁷ Zakia Khattabi questions the opportunity that this is done in the contemporary climate focused on the fight against terrorism, because she is afraid that the priority of this issue will make claims on the recognition of Islamophobia totally unheard and the matter definitely left behind: “opening a large debate today... we risk to loose. [...] we are within the irrational today on these questions” (RP32). There are issues of “political concurrence

mentioned government agreement for the Brussels-Capital region and the described measure adopted, at the city level this does not prevent discriminating actions to be undertaken such as the interdiction to Muslim women wearing headscarf to accompany their children during excursions with their school class. A reaction to this by a councillor of the Ecolo party has earned it with the accusation of “a drift towards a community-based approach [*une dérive communitariste* in French]” (RP32). Notwithstanding rough successes, moving within this political landscape is certainly hard task for the actors involved in the fight against Islamophobia.

While the formation of counter-narratives to Muslim hatred is strictly connected to the appearance of the notion of Islamophobia, this last is indeed a result of a longer process – rooted in the past – of change in the perception of Muslim migration in Belgium. According to Nouria Ouali (RP78) the perspective on Muslims in Belgium has undergone progressive change – and worsening – due to certain historical events. The identity assigned to Muslims shifted from workers (Ouali refers to the period of the work agreements settled after World War II between Belgium and foreign countries among which Morocco and Turkey) to internal enemies of the capitalistic society, and this occurred after the geopolitical changes symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall. “We become Muslims in the gaze of the other because this will be the element that explains problems” (RP78). Islamophobia would then be “a long historical process that configures in this political context” and the paradox is that it emerges precisely when Muslim migrants “integrate Belgian society and position themselves as any other citizen” (RP78). Associations mobilise to claim rights for foreigners and to obtain a law against racism starting from the 1970s. This process culminated in “one of the best legal arsenal to fight against discrimination”, as Mustapha Chairi claims (RP70, 8/10), even if its application is not always effective¹⁸. The main state organisms that deal nowadays with issues of discriminations at the federal level are the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (Unia¹⁹) and the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men (IEFH)²⁰. Figures on discrimination on religious basis were not available before 2012; Unia has the role of “consolidating this information, statistics collected through associations and reports” and the CCIB “monitors with Unia the evolution of Islamophobia in Belgium since 2011” (RP70, 8/10). Besides this, in 2012 on the initiative of Fadila Laanan, today State Secretary of the Brussels-Capital Region and former Minister for Culture, Audiovisual Affairs, Health and Equal Opportunity for the French Community of Belgium, a “Platform for the fight against racism”²¹ was put in place with the aim of encouraging member associations to develop a concerted strategy against racism. As one of our interlocutors claims²², this platform did not include a clear discourse on laicity and on Islamophobia, a fact which prevented it to be effective with regard to these issues. Moreover, the platform was concerned by an issue of representativeness in which racialized people or groups were not active members of it nor properly represented. At present, the platform is under redefinition by its members,

and electoralism” at stake (RP32), i.e. government and parties representatives consider the potential effects of their positioning on controverted issues on the choices of the voting population (municipal elections will be held in 2018).

¹⁸ Unia published in 2016 an evaluation of the Belgian laws against discrimination that is available from http://unia.be/files/Documenten/Evaluation_2016.pdf, accessed 23 November 2017.

¹⁹ Previously Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, this public organism was split into two institutional bodies in 2013: Unia, dealing with discrimination issues, and Myria, the Belgian Federal Migration Centre that deals with issues of migration in the country.

²⁰ The creation of a National Institute for Human Rights (INDH) in Belgium is being discussed and should occur within 2019, as announced in 2015 by Minister of Justice Koen Geens.

²¹ <http://www.luttecontreleracisme.be/>, accessed 8 November 2017.

²² This interlocutor asked to make this statement anonymous.

and the issue of Islamophobia is finally on its agenda. More generally, Belgium has also been working since 2001 on its “National Action Plan against Racism in the EU” (NPAR, stemming from an UN conference in 2001)²³ and this may include Islamophobia (RP23, 31/5). ENAR is actually working to make this plan move forward and be adopted.

It is interesting to mention in this section that introduces a diachronic perspective on Islamophobia and on counter-narratives to it the positioning of a relevant spiritual figure in the Belgian Muslim context. The imam Mustapha Kastit explains that Islamophobia is “a timeless and universal animosity”; as a consequence, the tools to counter it at least at the spiritual level are equally rooted in the past. Kastit refers to the fact that “the message that we [Muslims and Islam] bring is global”, meaning that it potentially deals with every “issues of society” (RP84) throughout ages. The tools that the sacred texts of Islam (the Koran and the collections of Hadiths of the prophet Muhammad²⁴) provide with are examples of postures and attitudes to assume in specific situations, here in the “relationship with someone that does not accept me, that shows his rejection”²⁵. These postures and attitudes are taken from the life of the prophet Muhammad²⁶ that faced past forms of Islamophobia, according to Kastit. He thus suggests Muslim believers to adopt his behaviour when dealing with similar situations, which consists of “relativizing facts [and take a distance from them] and react with cleverness” on the one hand, and of “resourcing through prayers and [...] fortifying one’s faith” on the other hand (RP84). Whether these tools may not be effective to solve cases of attested discrimination, it is important to include them in the analysis since, as we will see later, the psychological and moral effects of countering Islamophobia by victims themselves are part of the issues at stake.

4. Categorical list of most dominant counter-narratives to Muslim hatred

The description of the counter-narratives to Muslim hatred in Belgium that follows is structured through considering the connection between each of them and the narratives of hatred identified during the previous phase of this research. This means that the collected material in terms on the one hand of practices and tools and on the other hand of discourses expected to counter Islamophobia has been organized through associating each counter-narrative to the narrative of hatred that it aims at opposing to. Such organization, while it does not necessarily depend on direct references by the interviewees to specific narratives of hatred to explain their actions – since the categorical list of narratives of Muslim hatred was not always shown or described during interviews –, contributes to arrange the variety of collected data into groups of practices and discourses that are related to each other thanks to similar objectives and concerned sub-themes. Overlaps and interconnections are frequent, but they do not affect the analytical usefulness of this organization.

²³ Saïla Ouald Chaib (RP62) conducted a study on the feasibility of the implementation of the plan in Belgium available here: <http://www.hrc.ugent.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Study-racism-in-Belgium-FINAL-NL.pdf>, accessed 8 November 2017.

²⁴ Mustapha Kastit gives the references to specific Koranic verses or Hadith.

²⁵ Through a similar approach, Amr Abdalla looks for “potential principles for interpersonal dispute resolution models within an Islamic context” (Abdalla, 2001: 151). On the basis of this literature, Karamah organized a training session on mediation within Muslim families (see <http://www.peacefullives.be/fr/>, accessed 14 November 2017).

²⁶ Galaye N’Diaye, imam of the *Mosquée du Cinquantenaire* (see later) recalls the work of the Muslim World League (MWL) - Global Commission For Introducing The Messenger in promoting an appropriate presentation of the prophet Muhammad as well as of his life and teachings and of Islam values.

The ranking of counter-narratives in Belgium comes up as a result of this organization, i.e. the position of each of them in the overall list is related to the relative position of the narrative of Muslim hatred that they are expected to counter. The rationale justifying this ranking is that the relevance of counter-narrative with regard to their impact – attested or potential – is considered as proportionate to the relevance of the associated narrative of hatred.

The following analysis aims to be instructive about what is operating in Belgium to counter Islamophobia, and the examples presented are proved to have contingent positive outcomes. However, some tools and discourses may appear as still responding to a social hierarchy positioning Muslims as outsiders of full Belgian citizenship – in reason of the socio-cultural alterity assigned to them and not in terms of their legal status – and in need of gaining credit to access it. An effective change of this state of facts over time still requires to be observed, even though the described actions testify of Muslims’ active role in Belgian society and should be enough to overthrow this perspective. Throughout this working paper we will not recall further this important matter, notwithstanding our awareness of it, and this is because of the focus being on gathering concrete best practices – which our examples are – to meet the project overall aims.

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 1:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 1:</i>
Islamic practices need to be secularized to be accepted in Western societies	Muslims are professional experts

As a response to the social pressure exerted by the non-Muslim environment on Muslims in Belgium, several actions are developed to demonstrate Muslims’ role as active actors in the socio-economic sphere of Belgian society and at highlighting their contribution to this sphere without neglecting their religious belonging – and, on the contrary, through valuing it. Jamal Khayar (ABPM) states: “given the expertise that we have acquired throughout several years, we can apprehend reality and contribute to find solutions in relation to the problems that occur” (RP7). The focus on the professional expertise of Muslims responds to the fact that such social pressure is primarily impacting their work experiences, even if these are not the only ones affected. A recurrent tool mobilized to give visibility to Muslims’ expertise is that which we can call the tool of the “Success stories”. It consists of organizing public events where Muslims that succeeded in Belgian society – mainly at the professional level, but also at the social one (in terms of activities positively impacting social wellness) – have the possibility to tell their story. This tool takes different forms and involves different actors. In 2016 the Working group on Extremism, Populism, Nationalism and Xenophobia of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament organized in Brussels the event “Muslims in Europe – Untold Success stories” that concerned

“[...] people that succeeded, to show that integration is not always a failure, there are rather isolated cases [of failure], many people succeeded, a variety of examples, artists, doctors, a young student active in the political domain [...]. This conference was very well received, the council of Ministers mentioned this in their internal report. Our idea, our approach of showing our positive examples, [...] there are people that never meet, that never go to working-class neighbourhoods, in particular here, they are deputies, functionaries, and our idea was of making them connecting a bit” (RP1)

Molenbeek, a neighbourhood of Brussels with was recently under the spotlights and that is characterized – and mediatized as characterized – by a high demographic presence of Muslims, Anita Tusar mentioned the experience of *Molengeek*, a “group of social entrepreneurs in the domain of high-tech and internet in Molenbeek, they have given Molenbeek youth a space to come and work on computers” (RP1). Beside this example, in the panel entitled “Successful European integration stories”, intervened among others Dr Taoufik Ben Addi, Urologist surgeon and coordinator of uro-oncology at the Brussels’ *Clinique du Parc Léopold* to present his professional activities and his contributions to the local society. Ben Addi is also active within the local Socialist Party (PS). Recalling his life experience during our interview, he gives example of how social – and professional – pressure may trigger constrained choices:

“I always tried to keep the religious aspect inconspicuous, apart from during Ramadan, when they realize that I do not eat. [...] Apart from the fact that I do not drink alcohol and that I do not eat during Ramadan, I do not make stories about food. Avoid pork is quite easy [...], for the rest... I did not have a beard, I did not have religious appearance, I did not even speak about religion. [...] you need to make yourself inconspicuous, to pretend not to hear [discriminating discourses²⁷], and say amen. [...] this is a constrained choice; I did not use my freedom of expression. As soon as there was an [issue of] this cultural aspect... [...] There are shortcuts done automatically: [...] one who does not drink alcohol, is already probably an Islamist. One who pries is an Islamist and probably already a terrorist. One who does it at work, this is sure he is a terrorist!” (RP27).

This posture let our interlocutor avoid overt discriminations, even if he could feel some differences of treatment throughout his study and professional career, in particular at crucial moments such as during selections for new job appointments. He accepted to participate to the mentioned events as he believes to the importance of the “Success stories” as tool to fight discrimination in a double sense:

“On the one hand through mediatization, the promotion of this kind of events can motivate youth with migrant background to succeed and to make the effort to succeed through telling themselves: ‘if some succeeded, why not us? [...] events such as this can inspire youth [...]. The other aspect, [...] it could contribute to change the images of foreigners [...]. Not only we participate, but we bring a lot of things. There are people who innovate, there are people who bring techniques, [...] I stayed a year abroad to learn techniques that were difficult to implement in Belgium, [...] techniques that I could bring from abroad and make people in Belgium benefit from them” (RP27).

Besides this initiative, every year since 2013, Fatima Abbach and Saïd El Maliji (Divers-City²⁸ association) promotes the Diwan awards event, “dedicated to Belgian Moroccan talents and achievements”²⁹. Despite the fact that this initiative does not have a focus on religion and highlights, instead, the cultural background of Belgian with Moroccan origins in more general terms, it may be mentioned here as promoting similar narratives than those used to counter Islamophobia. The organizers speak of an “enormous desire of living together” that inspires this kind of events presenting

²⁷ He refers in particular to an episode when one of his superiors, while expressing his opinion on the Israeli-Palestine conflict, indirectly insulted him.

²⁸ The very same name of the association stresses the importance of diversity as essential character of urban contexts.

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4CvmuOiiZ8>, accessed 27 September 2017. The following quotations are all drawn from this video.

the “values of excellence” existing among Belgian Moroccans, as Prime Minister Charles Michel states. Other ministers promoting the initiative, as well the personalities awarded, highlight the “positive energy that exists in this country” (Rachid Madrane, Minister of Youth Aid, Houses of Justice, Sports and Promotion of Brussels to the Federation Wallonia-Brussels), or the force of Moroccan origins, which are “an asset and an inexhaustible capital” (Sara Benzidi, award winning lawyer) and make Moroccans being “people that succeeded, and that are today the Belgium of nowadays” (Mounia Benchekroun, office of the Minister of Economy and Employment for Brussels Capital Region Didier Gosuin).

These narratives may intersect directly the issue of religious discrimination faced among others by Moroccan people, as it implicitly emerges in the words of former Minister of Education (and previously for Employment and Equal Opportunities) Joëlle Milquet while introducing Hafida Hammouti, teacher and president of the CERI – Coordination of Islamic religion teachers, awarded in 2016: “[...] this event is in itself a project of society, against those who acclaim amalgams³⁰, the hatred of the other”. Such event promotes diversity, even if no stress is put on religion, and it is considered here in reason of the intersection and overlapping of ethnic and religious belonging and related identity assignments.

Another similar event that, on the contrary, highlights the Islamic religious positioning of its participants, while equally relying also on the support of non-Muslim actors, is the annual dining evening organized by the Belgian association of Muslim professionals (ABPM) in occasion of the sacred month of Ramadan. This event, of which the last edition held in 2017 was organized in cooperation with the Belgian section of the MUSIAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association, Turkey) is aimed at gathering Muslim entrepreneurs, businessmen and businesswomen, civil society leaders and other members of the associations to establish advantageous networks and also to get in contact with Muslim and non-Muslim personalities (mainly political representatives) invited to the event and promoting its values. The organizers highlight the will to strengthen economic convergences and to promote diversity within the economic world. Moreover, they stress the need of each entrepreneur to engage in his or her social role, i.e. in contributing to help disadvantaged people. In this discourse, Islamic benevolence is emphasized as a value for the whole Belgian society, in which it fosters ethical relationships between employers and employees and toward the government, and among people in a broader sense (RP34).

Besides this, ABPM also organizes events for professional orientation, called *Journée[s] décisive* (triggering day[s])³¹. They consist of:

“actions targeting youth to show them that [...] reaching objectives that are high objectives³² is not impossible. [...] it is a professional fair [...] animated by different professionals [...]. The aim is to realize that seniors that are issued from the same neighborhood [of these students] have reached goals that they thought unreachable. [...] also to give the opportunity to these

³⁰ In French *amalgame(s)* is used to describe generalization(s) and essentialization(s) aimed at discriminating individuals and groups of people.

³¹ A video on the 2017 edition is available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REbT0vcK2Eo>, accessed 9 November 2017.

³² He means professional positions that are socially and economically valued in the local context.

students to meet several mentors. [...] young people need to feel that some doors are opened [...].³³ (RP7)

The mediatization of these activities and of their success makes it possible, in more general terms, to “shed light [...] on diversity [...]” (RP7) and thus to promote a model of society where (religious) difference is valued as resource.

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 2:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 2:</i>
Veiling is incompatible with Western values and local rules	Feminism can be Islamic

The counter-narratives developed to counteract gender-oriented discriminations on Muslim women shape a feminist discourse – meant as discourse promoting women’s rights against various practices of limitations of these – which is both characterized by a religiously oriented meaning and associated to other forms of feminisms. Actions are implemented to promote different interconnected messages that converge into a core discourse on Islamic Feminism as means to claim shared women values and the specificities they assume in relation to Islamic religious belonging. The right of being active actors within society and to have professional ambitions is then connected to the statement of femininity as multi-faceted life experience that can include religiosity without affecting this right. Guaranteeing freedom of religion is necessary to give Muslim women the opportunity to enforce this right. More specifically applied to the Belgian context, this discourse means that laicity needs to be inclusive, thus not limiting the practice of religion in name of a misuse of the notion of neutrality³⁴. As Vincent Cornil (MRAX) explains, “laicity is indeed an important principle to prevent a religious institution from guiding political matters”, but this does not imply putting restrictions to religious dress (RP9). Similarly, Farida Tahar states: “laicity is a noble value. [...] [it consists of] the fact of securing everyone to have his freedoms, to fully benefit from them [...]” (RP28, 14/6).

Different practices are highlighted by our research participants as possible tools to develop such counter-narrative and to make it effective in improving Muslim women’s position in their lived context. These practices can be grouped as actions of promotion of Muslim women or as reactions to discrimination.

Concerning the actions of promotion of Muslim women, the MEP Anna Colombo (S&D) states the need of fostering the presence of Muslim women in the political life and of allowing them to possibly occupy any role at any political level: “[...] Muslim women should be more present in the political life, [...] as candidates in the lists for the elections etc., as spokespersons, there is almost not representation [of Muslim women] at the European Parliament” (RP2).

By addressing other possible conjugations of the socio-professional life of women, other interlocutors diffuse different messages and tools for promoting – and enabling – Muslim women active engagement in the local society. Among them, several “coaching” initiatives are aimed at giving

³³ They are all members of the network of the association. Besides this fair, following up actions include collaboration with schools to explore – through visits – the professional world, as well as a planned project of individual mentoring.

³⁴ See working paper 1 on the narratives of Muslim-hatred in Belgium for a deeper discussion on the application of this notion at the public and private level.

women the necessary tools to value and exploit their skills and to develop successful professional strategies. Consultancy proved to be a possible professional route to enhance expertise and assure recognition.

Essential to this process of promotion of Muslim women is the coalition building with feminist associations – building “bridges” with them (RP23, 12/9) – that are not specifically Muslim-oriented but that can support Muslim women initiatives in name of those shared values mentioned above.

“[...] all the values that our mothers and grandmothers defended for us are still valid and we should continue to fight in this direction [...]. Anyway we have to sit with these women [...] of Muslim religion, there are some that are completely laic but there are others that claim to be Muslim and feminist together, [...] they are women on the frontier, they are poorly seen by their men because they are real feminists, and by other women because they wear the headscarf and they have humanist values of religious type [...]. [...] what is important is that we share the same values, the route that we undertake and the paths that we undertake to get to these values are secondary” (RP2).

Within the framework of the ENAR Forgotten Women project, a group of activist women representatives of different feminisms collaborated to realise informative videos to share their opinions on the intersection between sexism, racism and religious discrimination and to make these tools, that also include the claim for the respect of women’s rights, available for training³⁵.

Mariem Sarsari of the Arab Women’s solidarity Association – Belgium (AWSA.be) explains that the aim of the association is linked to “what the feminists of the Arab world³⁶ can bring to us in Belgium with multicultural populations, with populations of Muslim faith among other. One of our missions is to break the clichés around women or Arab origin and around Arab world” (RP26). The initiatives undertaken to promote Arab cultures and the pedagogical and artistic tools used to do this³⁷ are aimed at reaching an “openness of mind”, at “changing the gaze on women of Arab origin, on the basis of their religious diversity, of their cultural diversity, of their life histories [...], we are there to complexify, to nuance, to show other things than those shown in the media” (RP26). This process of complexification also includes an accent on the professional role of women:

“[s]ometimes people do not imagine an Arab woman, Muslim or not, that is also professionally ambitious, that is interested in having a career. [...] there are plenty of young women that are very engaged, they are veiled, not veiled, some of them declare to be Muslim, other we do not know [...]” (RP26).

Among the photo exhibitions created by AWSA.be, one was devoted to Brussels feminist with Arab origin, stressing the fact that these women “actively participate to the construction of Belgian society. [...] It is urgent and fundamental to show a valuing image of women with migrant background and to

³⁵ <https://vimeo.com/199803450>, accessed 8 November 2017.

³⁶ For “Arab world” they mean all those countries where Arabic is the official language. Informing about the existence of feminisms in this broad geographical context is an aim *per se* of the association.

³⁷ They consist of: Arabic language courses, chorales, theatre plays, sensitization activities on multiple issues (living together, the access to health care, issues of identity, of communitarianism, of feminism, violence on women, etc.), etc. Some pedagogical kits used are available from the association website: <http://awsa.be/fr/page/coffrets-pedagogiques>, accessed 10 November 2017. One of them is devoted to Arab feminists and slam poetry: <http://awsa.be/uploads/outils%20p%C3%A9dagogiques/Outils%202017/SLAM%201%20Livret%20th%C3%A9orique%20%28AWSABE%29.pdf>, accessed 9 November 2017.

put forward their professional path, their attachment to Belgium and their engagements toward more justice and equality”³⁸. The objective is to promote “a Belgian citizenship first of all, but one that is also curious about cultures [...] of the Arab world” (RP26).

The activities of AWSA.be are also aimed at denouncing the violence undergone by refugee women for example, and in more general terms the objective is to deal with every issues of society through a gender lens. The interactive training put in place permit to “make a theme alive. [...] through culture we can really make mentalities evolve, and culture is so broad that we can diversify the activities” (RP26). The results on participants emerge on the long term, besides an immediate appreciation of the activity.

Going back more precisely on Islamic feminism, a re-reading of sacred texts is often the basis of it, as highlighted in Belgium by scholars among whom Ghaliya Djelloul and Malika Hamidi. The latter has recently published a book entitled “*Un féminisme musulman, et pourquoi pas?*” (“An Islamic feminism, and why not?”) that she promoted during an event – among others – organized in collaboration with the French Muslim feminist association Lallab. Other initiatives to promote Islamic feminism include lectures by Asma Lamrabet, director of the research Centre for Women's Studies in Islam (CERFI)³⁹, held at the Free University of Brussels (ULB). The promotion of women's active role in the interpretation of the sacred texts of Islam would counter, in the opinion of Farida Tahar, stereotypes concerning Muslims that have spread also in reason of a male monopole on this task during the past: “I would love that women take a more important place in this work that has been left in the hands of men long time ago, that interpreted sacred texts [...] with a male vision, and probably women have not integrated enough this dimension of re-reading of the texts” (RP28, 14/6).

Besides these theoretical discussions on Islamic feminism and also on its rootedness in the more or less recent past, some other initiatives are directly connected to contemporary issues. This is the case for the creation of the Kahina collective, a group of feminists that starting from the “burkini case”⁴⁰ wrote a “feminist and Muslim citizen declaration” aimed at promoting the creation of “emotional connivance, solidarity, linked interests on the equality of rights” (RP79).

Without necessarily declaring a position as feminist or Muslim feminists, some actors may contribute to nourish this debate in autonomous ways and putting an accent on their personal stories, as we can read in Mahinur Ozdemir's words: “the headscarf is a sign of women's emancipation. [...] I am proud to wear it” (RP25). In general terms, as Julie Pascoet underlines, “it is encouraging to see very motivated women that cultivate the love among sisters and benevolence” (RP23, 13/9). This cooperating process also lead to establishing international networks of Muslim women aimed at promoting their rights, as it is the case for Karamah, the already mentioned association of Muslim lawyers whose main goal is to bring to women's fulfilment through education (RP36, 30/6). This includes “practical workshops” that aim at providing women with tools to fight discrimination faced mainly within their education and professional life and also at creating safe spaces for sharing

³⁸ <http://awsa.be/uploads/Expositions/Dossier%20de%20presse%20-%20Expo%20photo%20AWSABe%20-%20feministes%20bruxelloises.pdf>, accessed 10 November 2017, p. 3.

³⁹ The CERFI was established in 2010 in affiliation to the official religious institution Rabita Mohammadia of Ulema in Rabat, Morocco.

⁴⁰ The reference is to the debates and related norms emerged first in France about the wearing of Muslim swimwear in public places.

experiences and knowledge, as Sakina Ghani explains: “we try to bring an alternative discourse so that the person thinks and determines by herself what is meaningful for her” (RP36, 30/6).

The reactions to Muslim women’s discrimination – that often shapes in terms of “the persecution of the visible Muslim woman”, for Saïla Ouald Chaib (RP62, 12/9), or of the “headscarf persecution”, for Eva Brems (RP46, 12/9)⁴¹ – operate at least at three levels: the level of the detection and collection of records of discrimination; the level of legal fights against undergone discrimination; the level of general mediations and recommendations.

Detection and collection of records of discrimination

Detecting Islamophobia against women may take the form of denouncing religious dress restrictions (“spreading as mushrooms or as an oil strain”⁴², RP62, 12/9) or of other practices affecting one or more women. At this level, several concrete tools are implemented to let women identify any ongoing process of discrimination and to fight it by claiming their rights – in their individual life – and by opposing any related dominant discourse on Muslim women – in the collective life. This fight aims to “make veiled women be legitimated in the public space. For some of them, this is not only an individual right that they claim, [...] they bring a project of society [...]” (RP32, 13/10). This process shapes on a “collective intelligence to react” (RP70, 8/10) against the discrimination of Muslim women, that suffer from the “cumulation of criteria of discrimination” (RP70, 8/10). It is important to consider the intersectional character of discrimination affecting women, including several potential dimensions of it: gender, ethnicity, racial assignation, religion, sexuality, ability, legal status (RP70, 8/10). Besides this, “the intersectional analysis of racism is [also] a tool [...] [against] minoritisation and domination” (RP79). Brussels is a particularly appropriate context where to adopt an intersectional approach to fight against discrimination since it is “like a laboratory. [...] it is important to value the image of Brussels and its inhabitants. It is this the most cosmopolitan city of the world. You need to make fights converge” (RP79). The intersectional approach also lets to integrate in this counter-narrative a post-colonial approach, as Karamah did in some training events organized in Flanders that let to “shed light on where things [discrimination] come[s] from” (RP36, 30/6). In fact, these approaches share a focus on layered identities as well as on power dynamics and economic and socio-cultural hierarchies that determine discriminations.

Specific forms for reporting need to be developed to highlight the gender dimension of discrimination undergone by Muslim women⁴³. Besides enabling legal intervention, they would inform statistics that account for “the extent of the phenomenon” (RP25) and provide databases with more specific details to be used in countering Islamophobia toward Muslim women. The production and sharing of data on

⁴¹ Both these scholars are initiators and members of a legal clinic on human rights established at the University of Ghent. Quotes are originally in English.

⁴² Saïla Ouald Chaib refers to the multiplication of these restrictions both in numbers and in typologies, and she explains how this process, started in 2004 with the general debate on headscarf, evolved toward the “burqa ban” (2011), then to address wearing long skirts at school (in recent years in Mechelen and Maline in the Flemish region, for example), and to the debate on the “burkini” (2016). This process acts as a “paradox of integration, [...] a vicious circle of exclusion involving prejudices, invisibility and discrimination” (RP62, 12/9).

⁴³ It is worth mentioning that for one of our interlocutors, men experience specific forms of discrimination based on their appearance that may be associated to specific ethnicity that women do not live, “especially if they do not wear a headscarf” (RP39).

this issue is crucial to the identification of a structural problem and to solve it. In the FEMYSO (Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations) 2016 report, we read:

“In January 2013, FEMYSO launched the Islamophobia Monitoring and Action Network project [IMAN]. For two years, the Islamophobia Monitoring and Action Network has been working to break the cycle of Islamophobia by building a strong network of grassroots organisations working on Islamophobia across Europe. The project, which is a partnership between FEMYSO and the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), aims to put in place a cross-European system for reporting Islamophobic acts and supporting victims of Islamophobia”⁴⁴.

The project also involved the Brussels section of the Forum. Besides this, the CCIB regularly commits on making a deeper analysis of figures gathered and diffused by Unia, and this through focusing on specific criteria to discern relevant data. Moreover, the CCIB is working on developing a own form to record discriminations that includes further specifications enabling such deeper analysis, i.e. the possibility of notifying whether the reported discrimination involves any visible religious sign – directly addressed or not by the discriminator – of the victim. Hajib El-Hajjaji explains the added value of these additional criteria: “visibility plays as trigger, [...] knowing the profile of the aggressor, if the aggressor is systematically a man when victim is a woman, this reinforces the idea that it is a sexual discrimination. If the aggressor is systematically an institution in the domain of school or in the domain of work...” (RP35, 30/6), this enables to speak of structural discrimination. Moreover, a specific “anonymous reporting mechanism” (RP23, 31/5) may be effective to help women that are undergoing discrimination at work to denounce it without immediate implications on their job position, and to trigger a general control on the policies of the concerned firm. “Documenting the gendered dimension of Islamophobia” was also among the aims of the Forgotten Women project held by ENAR, so to “have voices that speak about this, in order to objectify the phenomenon and make it possible to do advocacy [...] and to put the issue of Muslim woman on the European agenda” (RP23, 13/9).

Legal fights against undergone discrimination

Reactions to discrimination may also take the form of legal fight against the undermining of women’s rights. The CCIB has supported several law cases against the interdiction of headscarf in schools and these actions have recently been framed within the broader campaign *#Openschool4women* (2016-2017)⁴⁵. Among them, a recent action (2016) concerned the *Haute École de la Province de Liege*, that was finally obliged to remove the restrictions put to religious dress⁴⁶. This process let address the structural discrimination present in public institutions in spite of law being on the side of victims – if it is applied properly. The lack of a clear positioning at the political level on this specific issue – reminding

⁴⁴ <http://femyso.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Femyso-annual-report-2016.pdf>, p. 18, accessed 24 October 2017.

⁴⁵ See <http://ccib-ctib.be/index.php/2017/03/07/8-mars-openschool4women-une-campagne-pour-favoriser-ensemble-laces-aux-etudes-superieures/>, accessed 24 November 2017. It consists of a campaign aimed at collecting information and cases of Muslim women’s discrimination in schools, at reacting to them through supporting victims and at sensitizing about this issue. Gathering funds to support law litigations is among the objectives of this campaign, as of other specific events (galas) organized by the CCIB.

⁴⁶ See http://unia.be/files/Documenten/Rechtspraak/Tribunal_de_premiere_instance_de_liege_4_octobre_2016.pdf, accessed 20 November 2017.

that schools cannot enforce religious dress restrictions to students⁴⁷ – obstruct the definitive solution of this issue. Toward this solution, parents are also encouraged to react whether the students concerned by discrimination are minors (RP70, 8/10).

Successful case laws and strategic court litigations (Karamah, among others, is engaged with this tool) foster the creation of specific “legal arsenals” – meant here as sets of established precedents to guarantee further successes – since “to constitute a claim you need to have coherent juridical arguments” (RP36, 30/6).

The Actiris⁴⁸ case (2015), i.e. the complaint of three women against the interdiction of wearing headscarf for the employees of this service, marked an important point in the fight against the discrimination of Muslim women, a fight aimed at giving them the possibility of continue working as “source of autonomy, of subsistence” (RP35, 30/6). In Flanders, the feminist association BOEH! (Boss of my own head⁴⁹) also succeeded in some law cases in which they supported women against the prohibition of wearing headscarf in local schools; nevertheless, the members of this association stress the fact that these successes are strictly based on individual cases⁵⁰ and that they do not change the overall situation. This process of change would need the support of political parties (RP40, 12/9) to also produce a “shift in thinking” (RP62, 12/9). That is why, as Yasmina Akhandaf highlights, “much of lobbying, [...] advocacy, awareness raising, training” are essential (RP40, 12/9). This discourse puts forward the effectiveness, also at the political level, of the “contact theory, if you have contact with people, this can change your mind. [...] step out of your natural context, and be in contact with people who think differently” (RP79, 12/9).

A huge discussion emerged at the local level after the decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU or ECJ) on the Achbita and Bougnaoui cases about whether there are or not positive and exploitable effects of these decisions. Before the decisions, ENAR and Amnesty International already published a jointed analysis⁵¹ of these law cases (RP23, 31/5). At present, ENAR is working on a parliamentary interpellation on how the EU institution will monitor the effects and implementations of the decisions (RP23, 31/5). For the directors of Unia, “[t]he decision of the European Court of Justice [on the Achbita case] brings clarity” as it states that “[t]he company must have a neutrality policy in place that is coherent and systematic and that is applied to all philosophical, religious and political insignia”⁵². For many civil society actors there is a “wider implication of this judgement on anti-discrimination laws” at the nation-state level (RP50, 12/9). Legal controversial questions aroused by these decisions concern the interpretation of EU regulations on the issue of difference in treatment

⁴⁷ Indeed schools do it in name of their sovereignty on internal rules, but when these are questioned through law, they are finally obliged to take a step back.

⁴⁸ The Brussels public employment service.

⁴⁹ It consists of a feminist movement made of members “with various philosophical background and [promoting] creative actions” (RP40, 12/9).

⁵⁰ Indeed, some other court litigations failed because the young women in question graduated during the legal process and thus the discriminating fact did not exist anymore for the Court. Broader actions against headscarf prohibition in Flemish schools include the offer of a publication on headscarf to directors “to discuss the issue with regard to human rights” (RP41, 12/9). In the French speaking regions of Belgium, a similar analysis is realized by Julie Ringelheim (League for human rights, available from http://www.liguedh.be/images/PDF/documentation/documents_thematiques/ldh_note_foulard_2017.pdf, accessed 11 September 2017).

⁵¹ <http://enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/eur0150772016english.pdf>, accessed 8 November 2017.

⁵² <http://unia.be/en/articles/the-achbita-case-clarity-about-the-headscarf-ban-in-the-workplace>, accessed 13 October 2017.

(and dismissal) at work and its direct or indirect link to religion. The legal paradoxes that lawyers see in these decisions make some opportunities for legal actions possible after the ECJ rulings and bypassing them. Anyway, the decisions arouse diffused concern about its possible implications, in particular with regard to the different treatment that Muslim women may be object of depending of the visibility of their professional role within the company (the “back/front office” issue, mentioned as controversial by Julie Pascoet, RP23, 31/5, among others) and to the impact of this process on recruitment. Moreover, the notion of neutrality implied by these decisions needs to be unpacked, in particular today, against the dogmatic defence of it (RP32, 16/10): “what is neutral today in such diverse Europe, where there are plenty of differences that are visible, what does this mean?” (RP23, 31/5).

Besides individual law procedures, collective reactions to the discrimination of Muslim women can emerge and shape as boycotting actions, for example, as it happened in Flanders responding to dress restrictions imposed to Muslim employees in a shoes shop. The success of this kind of reactions is linked to the economic impact involved, more than on a real understanding of the discrimination occurred. Nevertheless, a positive contribution of this process is the mobilization of numerous people around a specific issue, and this is often realized through the use of social media (RP62, 12/9).

Civic society actors encourage women to report discrimination that may be object of law process through detailing facts minutely, “through listing the factual, the observable and the measurable” since this enables victims to “categorise and structure their ideas” (RP70, 8/10) and thus to acquire a status of actors having a crucial role in building solutions (RP70, 22/9). Mustapha Chairi states: “it is vital to collect information to fight against Islamophobia. [...] without complaint, there is no discrimination, and it is victims that have to complain” (RP70, 8/10). Nevertheless, this process may be proving for women and it needs to be accompanied by psychological support to them. “Putting words on the suffering of the victims of Islamophobia, on their emotional reactions to the facts, ‘I feel what I feel’” (RP36, 7/10) is crucial to the effectiveness of following actions of denunciation and also to acquire trust in oneself. Safe spaces are settled to promote this verbalization (for example during the already mentioned workshop organized by Karamah in October 2017). The emotional charge – a “choc” for Mustapha Chairi (RP70, 8/10) – that accompanies this process has to be considered throughout it. This is also because of the demotivation of women to undertake a difficult route while being in a disadvantaged position – not in terms of their right but in terms of assignations within the local society: “victims don’t want to fight, they don’t think that they belong to the society”, states Layla Azzouzi (CCIB, RP42, 12/9). This feeling is also accompanied by “the fear of institutions” (RP70, 22/9), since victims are worried about the fact that complaining about a discrimination would not lead to solve the situation but would rather reinforce their disadvantaged position. The reference is to the anti-radicalization plans put in place in Belgian cities such as Brussels that would instil a sense of suspicion among institutional agents when dealing with issues concerning Muslims. In this climate, Muslims fear resorting to those organisms that prove to be much more interested in scrutinizing their life in search for evidences of guilt than in responding to demands and claims against the discrimination that they experience. It is important here to “avoid traps” (RP78, 7/10)⁵³ represented by some discriminating questions that can be asked to victims. For Mustapha Chairi, there are some other traps to avoid: keeping a posture of victim and engaging in competition with other victimized people or groups;

⁵³ Nouria Ouali talks about “traps” to describe questions asked to Muslim women during job interviews and she underlines the importance of returning the question to their interlocutor to challenge his or her position and to become active subject in the conversation (RP78).

conducting the fight only through the support of other victims (instead of finding varied alliances) (RP70, 8/10).

As we already mentioned it, Mustapha Kastit also points out the effects of facing Islamophobia at a moral level, stressing the need to reinforce one's spiritual positioning through prayers when facing situations that "destabilize" the believer, who has to "bear the nuisance of others and to repel its harm in the best way" (RP84). Islamophobia is in fact a form of racism that "touches something which is intimate, one's faith, and it has disproportionate effects beyond juridical issues", as stated by Marwan Muhammad (RP85). Due to the complexity of these dynamics, the CCIB underlines the importance of "professionalizing the network of people that come to us to report Islamophobia" (RP70, 22/9). The *veilleurs de l'Islamophobie*, i.e. those people who, not necessarily victims of discrimination, monitor media and politics as well as everyday life domains to alert the association and solicit eventual reactions when facts of discrimination occur, need to be trained to make reporting more precise and effective.

Besides resorting to legal procedures, women may put in place individual strategies when they face discriminating processes on the basis of their religious belonging. This can occur during their studies, for example. One of our interlocutors narrates that she used to ask other students to assist her during university exams with professors that had previously made overt discriminating statements on her (RP25). Or, in other occasions, Muslim women may adopt strategic discourse to question, for example, the injunction of removing their headscarf in particular situations. Mahinur Ozdemir found herself in this situation when she was at secondary school and she was asked to take off her headscarf during a visit to a theatre, and the mentioned reason for this was that veils, as hats, need to be taken off in such a place. She motivated her refusal through saying that her uncovered hair would have prevented people behind them to see the scene. While this is anecdotal, it indeed gives a concrete example of shifting the perspective to react to a narrative of hatred, an example that succeeded. In another case recalled by Taoufik Ben Addi, a woman used to wear an operation cap throughout her day at hospital notwithstanding whether she was in the operating room or not to cover her head without using a headscarf. The need for finding appropriate and strategic discourse to counter discrimination or unjust treatment can also lead to undertake further study, as it happened to Farida Tahar when she decided to enrol in an additional university degree in Human Rights: "Within one's life, when we fight for rights that we believe equitable, you need to equip yourself judiciously and not to blindly rush, and secure your safety. [...] because it can cost you your work, it can cost you... [...] [Thus] I wanted to make the juridical tool my own [...]" (RP28, 14/6).

Mediations and recommendations

Several forms of mediation and the elaboration of recommendations against the discrimination of Muslim women can operate at a broader level to prevent discrimination from occurring again. Among others, Unia implement these tools to react to specific records, when parties involved by an attested discrimination are called to participate to a process of concertation and negotiation. In case this process fails, legal routes can be undertaken, but this occurs in relatively few cases, as highlighted by Caroline Rosillon: "There are not even 2% of the records that we deal with at Unia that go to the

courts⁵⁴ (RP8). Besides this, starting from specific cases or from more general societal interpellations, Unia can elaborate recommendations aimed at sensitizing on issues of discriminations, as Nathalie Denies explains:

“Some people today contact us about important societal debates. [...] we work on global questions of Islamophobia, [...] of equality, of policies for equalities, [...] we give our opinion and recommendations with regard to policies for equality, with regard to the notion of living together, [...] of living in relationship within society” (RP37).

This work of sensitization is implemented in partnership with local actors: “We try to work in partnership with the associative world and with public actors, cities, municipalities, in function of what is already implemented [...]. We really want to be inserted in the local associative network and work together with the local actors” (RP8). In Liège this work targets youth in particular and it included the organization in March 2017 of the *#DonneMoi1Minute* initiative against racism⁵⁵. Artistic workshops were settled in a square in the city and the students of six local schools were invited to participate to the activities aimed at “sensitizing on the fight against racism and prejudices. [...] The aim is to express messages of anti-racism through arts” (RP8). Other workshops held in April 2017 concerned specifically the staff of Walloon municipalities, and that of some public services connected to them⁵⁶.

Sensitizing general people through a variety of actions is also among the preoccupations of MRAX, as its director underlines:

“You need to seize every opportunity to mobilize people, the legal service, the social service, a film projection, a debate, we capture people’s attention [...] every events are opportunities, and we raise awareness, we release a political discourse, [...] that racism is one thing, xenophobia is one thing, Islamophobia is one thing [...] but they all participate to a same dynamic, and the answer to this dynamic needs to be a counter-dynamic. [...] stimulating people’s work. [...] change emerges from the bottom” (RP9).

While reacting to discrimination, it seems that several organisms adopt similar steps, i.e. attempting first at finding a negotiated solution among parties⁵⁷, then resorting to legal procedure if concertation fails, and in any case positioning publicly on the concerned matter. At MRAX, as Nimat Bennacer highlights: “it is more through negotiation that we try to put forward the rights of the parties. [...] we try to remind people that the law allows freedom of religion for everyone. [...] and later the sanctions, we first remind of the principle that is in this case that of the freedom of religion” (RP11, 26/5).

⁵⁴ The case of the HEPL is among these, since the attempts to find a negotiated solution have failed (RP8). Further mediating actions occurred after the law process and others that are still ongoing concern the modification of the institute rules to respect individual rights as a priority next to the school’s internal needs.

⁵⁵ <http://unia.be/fr/sensibilisation-et-prevention/campagnes/donnemoui1minute-actions-en-wallonie>, accessed 21 November 2017.

⁵⁶ Such as the Public Centre for Social Welfare (CPAS) and the Social Cohesion Plan (PCS). The invitation to the initiative is available from: http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/sites/default/files/downloads/invitation-journeecommunes27avril_2.pdf, accessed 21 November 2017. Among the proposed workshops, one was about the management of convictional diversity at workplace, another one on discrimination and housing, and another one on hate crime (RP8).

⁵⁷ This necessarily implies the presence of a representative for each party involved: “whatever the conflict is, you need the parties to agree in finding a solution, you need a will from each, a minimum of trust and respect [...], you need to put the [...] parties into action” (RP28, 14/6).

The issue of the veil is crucial in this process of reaction to discrimination of Muslim women as it is catalyst of both narratives of and counter-narratives to Muslim hatred with a focus on gender, and as it is object of large mediatization. Nevertheless, widening the perspective on this issue to embrace larger reflexions on Muslim women's rights, permits to avoid the risk of being stuck into this specific debate.

A way of doing this is to focus on the adoption of inclusive policies rather than on the engagement in specific fight against religious discrimination. Soumia El Majdoub explains how this can work in the private sector. She is the Founder of Urbanpreneurs, a knowledge and research lab, working at the intersection of urbanism, entrepreneurship and migration. She is also an advisor for administrations, private companies and NGOs, using an innovative approach of formulating responses to diversity issues and to come up with business innovations in the field of diversity and inclusion⁵⁸. A key point consists of finding appropriate allies, through considering that "people who do not express their opinion [directly on religious dress restrictions] can still be partners in the struggle" (RP53, 13/9). Then, for this consultant it is important to put in place "out of the box strategies" (RP53). To give an example, she suggests a campaign that would testify of "funny ways of making [one's] point", i.e. the launch of slogans that, instead of promoting the boycott of firms adopting religious dress restrictions, sound like "we love [Company name], why don't you love us?" (RP53, 13/9). This kind of initiatives permits "the engagement in acts of citizenship" instead of staying in a "logic of emotional minority" that is based, in the opinion of this interlocutor, on non-intellectualized experienced frustrations (RP53). For her, the argument of racism does not work since "your definition of racism isn't the one used by racists" (RP53), meaning that perspectives on discriminations are different depending on the actors adopting them and keeping the struggle at this level will not be useful for long-term success based on dialogue to build inclusive long-lasting solutions. Diversity is then a means to measure inclusion, and not the objective of the undertaken process. Proximity and empathy with all possible involved actors may indeed be effective to promote the connection between diversity and innovation, for example⁵⁹. As Jamal Khayar also puts it, "economics [and businesses] are incompatible with racism" (RP7). This means to establish alliances "with those who have nothing to do with racism, with feminism etc." and to "develop a solidaristic citizen agenda beyond ethno-cultural borders and minority claims" (RP53, 13/9)⁶⁰, thus focusing to foster a broader issue of economic development involving Muslim individuals.

Some examples of companies or organisms that implement an "inclusive neutrality" (RP23, 13/9) exist in Belgium, and includes the public social welfare centre CPAS (*Centre Public d'Action Sociale*) in Louvain that recently adopted internal regulation allowing Muslim women that are part of its staff to wear headscarf if they want to, regardless of their function in the centre⁶¹. The insurance company AXA also implements inclusive neutrality (RP70, 7/10), testifying of positive cases that need to be put forward.

⁵⁸ RP53, personal communication, 15/10/2017.

⁵⁹ Crucial to this process is to provide with "numbers", i.e. with figures that prove how companies adopting diversity policies – or merely composed of culturally mixed staff at all levels and roles of the company – make fruitful business results: "if you put numbers, there's never a counter-discourse on that" (RP..., 13/9).

⁶⁰ Soumia El-Majdoub quotes the "Deep democracy" tool as example of this approach to the resolution of tensions and conflict in businesses (see <https://deep-democracy.net/>, accessed 23 October 2017).

⁶¹ <http://www.lesoir.be/115658/article/2017-09-22/le-cpas-de-louvain-autorise-le-port-du-voile-sans-limite>, accessed 25 October 2017.

Other organisms – trade unions among others – have more general “diversity plans” to which victims of discrimination are encouraged to rely on: “you have to demand your rights, using your rights of affiliated [to Trade Unions] worker. You have to resort to people of trust within companies, you have to complain in formal way” (RP70, 8/10). In March 2017 the CSC, the FGVB and the CGSLB trade unions signed an Inter-union declaration against racism at work (*Déclaration intersyndicale contre le racisme au travail*) to engage toward the elimination of racism in enterprises⁶². A 2008 order concerning the Brussels-Capital region fosters systems of quota in public services targeting people that live in disadvantaged neighbourhood⁶³. Nonetheless, this modality of securing diversity within public services or enterprises – as well as the more specific introduction of “ethnic” or “diversity” quota – is strongly criticized by several actors as it would constitute a means to continue the process of identity assignments to people with migrant background and a way to discursively keeping them outside the local society.

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 3:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 3:</i>
Islamic belonging (claimed or assigned) is a prior identity marker	Being Muslim is something normal

The starting point of the reflections on how to counter a stereotyping discourse on Muslims which see their Islamic belonging (claimed or assigned) as inevitably impacting their position in intellectual and political debates is that identity is multiple and religion only constitutes one among the factors shaping it. Mahinur Ozdemir significantly highlights that “I am not a moving headscarf, [...] I have other ideas, I can speak about them, and I can talk about constructive themes, [...]” (RP25). The complexity of identity is underlined: “[...] religion is nothing more than a piece of our multiple identities [...], women, men, right wing, left wing, that love football, and the other, I don’t know, volleyball... let’s stop considering our fellow citizens of Muslim religion as if they were only this” (RP2).

Shifting the focus on other facets of Muslims’ identity – thus making commonplace (*banaliser*⁶⁴ in French in the words of Taoufik Ben Addi, RP27) of Muslims and their Islamic belonging – enables to prioritize the fact that Muslim representatives are democratic actors and that they are also endowed with the civic right of accessing media. This process reacts to

“the disqualification of Muslim actors that are [...] in a critical attitude toward society and [...] in a will of autonomy with regard to society. They are not always understood and they are looked at as a kind of enemies of society, while they are not [...], they are people who adopt a position of democratic actors that within a democracy have the right of questioning public policies, of making proposals, of developing private initiatives” (RP35, 30/6).

This disqualification emerges as dichotomist categorization of good / bad Muslims or as association of Muslim representatives to negatively represented groups: Salafists, jihadists, members of Muslim Brotherhood etc. (RP35, 30/6). This disqualification is alimented through media, since often “Muslim

⁶² The Brussels Intercommunal Transport Company (STIB) is among them.

⁶³ See https://www.arp-gan.be/images/upload/files/Ordonnance-04_09_2008.pdf, accessed 24 November 2017.

⁶⁴ The message conveyed by this expression is that “being Muslim is not more dangerous, more risky for the society than being non-Muslim” (RP27).

people, when they are interviewed, they are reduced to their religion” (RP24). Reacting to this process means for those Muslims who do it to become “means of normalizing Muslims” (RP35, 30/6), of making them part of the norm, even when they position themselves in a critical way toward certain facts of local society. “Muslim actors that are engaged in politics are not necessarily Islamists or terrorists or people that are the equivalent of extreme right of Muslims [...]!” (RP35, 30/6).

As for the discrimination concerning more specifically women, the practices and tools mobilized to make this counter-narrative operational can be analysed as means to countering discrimination in some cases, and as means of promoting Muslim individuals’ positioning in the lived context in some other – more general – cases.

Countering discrimination

The monitoring and denunciation of discriminating or stereotyping discourse on Muslims spread in politics and media is among the tasks of different actors, such as the Working group on Extremism, Populism, Nationalism and Xenophobia of the Group of the S&D in the European Parliament.

“Each morning we send to the deputies the monitoring of the press and sometimes we decide to react in terms of actions at the Parliament; for example, we may promote a resolution [...]. Either with the Committee on Civil Liberties or with a press release, or if the president wants to do something... it is an alert, a warning system. We also look at the social media, at all political groups of extreme right at the Parliament [ENF, Europe of Nations and Freedom Group], within European Union” (RP1).

Such monitoring can be accompanied by informal network and information sharing, which is “very useful to inform and alert our deputies if they have to react to any news” (RP1):

“[we are in] a privileged position to gather data, we are in an international institution, we have colleagues and deputies, it comes up fast to collect, alert. We are in a privileged position to see how Islamophobia develops and if it starts creating connections in Europe. [...] one of the adhesives that hold them [nationalist groups] together to claim a certain identity [...] is the issue of immigration and refugees, and as if by chance the large majority of refugees and immigrants are Muslims. Thus, the Islamophobia of these people has a history that we have to monitor, control and denounce because indeed it hides behind it a far right that organizes itself in a pan-European manner” (RP2).

Moreover, training sessions are organized at the European Parliament to provide MEPs with tools to counter racist messages that may emerge during plenaries from populist discourse (RP22). This responds to “the need to speak out and say stop, since silence means acceptance”, as the trainer Elizabeth Drury explains through stressing the necessity of ensuring “effective [counter-]communication, of preparing people to have confidence and strength to impact their public” (RP22). Specific communication techniques – both verbal and body – shall privilege the use of “messages that are easy to remember, snapshots out of a background” and shall be based on “the belief in what we say, [...] on personal experience, [...] so to be less open to attacks” (RP22). Elizabeth Drury mentions the work of the European Women’s Lobby as example of “gender communication against racism” (RP22).

Going back to monitoring actions, those of the CCIB consist of “mapping Islamophobia, [...] taking all the information and objectivize them to show that there is Islamophobic act. Such information is compulsory to do advocacy. Others among our interlocutors participate to monitoring projects that

are settled at a European level, such as the Facing Fact program on hate crime and hate speech, to which ENAR, CEJI (A Jewish contribution to an inclusive Europe) and Unia participate⁶⁵.

Journalist networks are also active in monitoring the “media coverage of ethnicity and religion in Europe”⁶⁶, as Ricardo Gutierrez, general Secretary of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ⁶⁷) explains:

“In Belgium there is a code of deontology, and a council for deontology⁶⁸. [...] Most of these codes include norms that encourage journalists to avoid discrimination [...]. There is an existing world code, of the International Federation of Journalists. [...] journalists did not know legislations, national, [...] fact which makes it problematic to cover issues of religious and discrimination. This study culminated in recommendations to journalists, to editors, to universities, to schools, and to federations and trade unions of journalists” (RP24).

Concretely, the council for deontology in journalism in Belgium deals with claims on the prejudicial treatment of issues – among others – related to Islam and Muslims through words or images. After analysing the facts and if no negotiation is possible, it delivers judgments that consist of

“moral sanction, and it needs to be moral because we are within ethics. [...] and this works, because when the name of the journalist, it is written that he has been condemned [by the council], it counts. For journalists the gaze of the peers counts a lot, the reputation. Thus these sanctions work. [...] it is a co-regulation” (RP24).

The state intervenes in case there is complaint and then attested violation of the law, and the statements of the Council are eventually mobilized in the law process. The EFJ also monitor hate speech, which is mainly diffused, in Gutierrez’s opinion, in social media and in the reactions to articles (this is confirmed by Unia, see later) more than in articles themselves. “We find that media have a responsibility, journalists have a responsibility, and thus we are engaged with this” (RP24). Gutierrez refers to the Media Against Hate campaign⁶⁹ supported by the European Commission and conducted in collaboration with associations of the civil society. Training for journalists is also developed with the same objective of fighting against hate speech in media. Mahinur Ozdemir is equally contributing to create a working group on hate speech in social media with the aim of promoting a system of administrative fines to punish racist discourse in the Internet on the basis of a model already adopted in the Brussels-West police zone (RP25).

⁶⁵ <http://www.facingfacts.eu/>, accessed 16 November 2017. Besides monitoring actions, this EC funded program includes instructions to social workers who receive victims to be able to gather relevant information (RP67).

⁶⁶ The 2012 report of this study is available here: http://www.media-diversity.org/en/additional-files/documents/b-studies-reports/EJI_study_FINAL%20for%20Web.pdf, accessed 8 November 2017.

⁶⁷ EFJ is an international network composed of 71 national associations of journalists based in 43 countries of the European continent. It includes the General association of professional journalists in Belgium (AGJPB) which is composed of the AJP, *Association des Journalistes Professionnels* for the French-speaking regions and the VVJ, *Vlaamse Vereniging van journalisten* for the Flemish region. The AJP fostered the creation of the Council for deontology in journalism in Belgium and its code (<http://codededeontologiejournalistique.be/>, accessed 10 November 2017) that includes anti-discrimination norm (art. 28). These networks adhere to the Chart of Munich (<http://www.ajp.be/telechargements/droitsdevoirs.pdf>, accessed 9 November 2017) stating the rights and duties of journalists.

⁶⁸ Gutierrez is among its members that also include besides journalists, civil society actors, lawyers and academics and for a third of the total number of participants. On the website of the council, it is possible to access the collected complaints (<http://lecdj.be/>, accessed 8 November 2017).

⁶⁹ <http://europeanjournalists.org/mediaagainsthate/>, accessed 9 November 2017.

Monitoring as tool to counter Islamophobia and here more specifically the discrediting of Muslim representatives is effective if it leads to concrete actions, mainly at the political level:

“we need to provide ourselves with tools to work like this; how to keep all this back, an agenda of repressive laws, asking for a European directive that is very horizontal against all kinds of discrimination, making European resolutions, sensitizing against Islamophobia” (RP2).

The need for acting at the political level is also stressed by actors dealing with the local and federal governments: “Today discrimination is something purely political. [...] We need a political counter-power” (RP70, 8/10). This is also because we assist, in the opinion of Mustapha Chairi to a “crisis of the anti-racism”, since “militants are consumed” (RP70, 8/10)

The narration of stories of discrimination that some Muslim politicians have undergone also contributes to give voice to their lived experience against what has been mediatized with the aim of excluding them from the local political scene. This may take the form of a book project, as in the case of one of our research participants that described as a sort of “psychosis” the devastating effects that discrimination has got on him at a personal level⁷⁰.

Promoting Muslims’ visibility

Concerning the promotion of Muslim individuals in the political scene and their medialization as positive actors within it, several research participants stress the general need for promoting diversity in responsibility posts. As Jamal Khayar explains, “it is important that the institutions⁷¹ that represent population be the mirror... its [of the population] reflection” (RP7). This also means for Muslims to engage in the political domain and to make this visible through the development of spaces⁷² and tools to communicate: “[we need] to be actors of change, to position in a positive and constructive manner, to participate to the public debate [...] with an appropriate language⁷³; through making our expertise available” (Hajib, 22/9). Gutierrez explains:

“I pushed Muslim [...] leaders to speak out, [...] during a period they were completely absent from the press, at least as opinion leaders. [...] never as active citizen that has something to say about society. [...] the fact that they do not have access to the media, consists of denying them their right to citizenship” (RP24).

Systematically including Muslims into debates concerning society issues would contribute to “normalize” Muslims’ presence in the concerned fields and not considering it as an “exception” (RP24), since the fact of making their recurrence visible, would finally lead to focus no more on their religious belonging but rather on their actions and discourse that are not necessarily related to it: “they should be allowed to intervene without describing this is as ‘it’s a Muslim who speaks’” (RP24). As Johan Leman highlights, stressing also an issue of generation, there is a need for “young [Muslim] people that continue to make statements [...] and that prove being people that are simply very normal” (RP6).

⁷⁰ The interviewee expressed the will of being anonymised with regard to this information.

⁷¹ He refers in particular to economic institutions, where Muslims’ businesses are underrepresented.

⁷² The need for a greater representativity of minorities in media has been stressed by several research participants.

⁷³ Redouane Safdi highlights the need to “use the right language and the right tone” (RP39, English in the original quotation), that means taking active and firm position, constructing an alternative discourse and avoid speaking as if to justify one’s voice in the debate.

Hajib El-Hajjaji is among those of our research participants that decided to undertake a political route. He is candidate for local elections in his city, Verviers (Walloon region):

“Verviers is a city that I love, I like to get involved with it, I did it already six years ago⁷⁴. [...] I was [also] candidate for the European elections [in 2014] [...], and I took this again. The priority is on my work, [...] but if next to this I can make some things move, for example making mentality change in Verviers... as municipal councillor I can put some subjects on the table. [...] there is means for making some issues go forward [...]” (RP35, 30/6)

The political participation of Muslims is thus seen as means to put their own expertise on different subjects at disposal of the general community, but also as opportunity to make diversity be further respected. There is a need for “taking advantage of the opportunities that one and the other can bring to this society” (RP27) and to make them possible pretexts for change: “things can change from the bottom, but sometimes it goes faster if it comes from the top, you need the top change. Political deciders, if they are not connected with people that defend certain ideas... [...]” (RP27). Jamal Khayar explains:

“If we take a Muslim, he is concerned by [issues of] mobility, taxation, education, etc. But he also has some specificities that are at point three, point four etc. So he will speak of those aspects [...] but he will also speak of these specificities. For us an essential condition is to serenely and fully assume what we are” (RP7).

It is an issue of morality concerned here, as Ben Addi explains: “when someone is Muslim, Christian, or secular, he has a moral that he brings with him everywhere he is. This moral, you cannot take it away from him, and probably it is better not to take it away, whether it is in his private life or in his public life” (RP27). Assuming his or her own morality for Muslims at the public level does not occur without difficulties, as Mahinur Ozdemir recalls when she talks about “feeling depreciated” throughout her political career, and above all at its beginning, when she was told that she “would never go forward with this [veil]” (RP25):

“During the years at CDH⁷⁵ I underwent this form of Islamophobia that emerged around me, [...] and at the beginning I tried to understand, I told myself that since I was the first [veiled] deputy, I would try to... to normalize the presence [of Muslims], it’s normal that I have to do this... [...]. I worked much more than the others, to normalize my presence. But as I saw an exasperation also of my voters that said that I never talked about issues linked to the headscarf and other... but I couldn’t speak, it was really an interdiction, my freedom of expression has been taken, my freedom of being myself has been stolen” (RP25).

Notwithstanding the experienced difficulties, continuing engaging in politics is depicted as crucial to give Muslims voice. This engagement does not necessarily and not always mean to be enrolled in a party, as Farida Tahar explains: “the political engagement in a party is not an end in itself, for me it is a strategic tool as others, [...] if it comes to an end one day, this will not prevent me from militating in a way or another, the [political] engagement is not at the door of a party” (RP28, 14/6). The engagement in the political domain also concerns other actors than politicians, such as associations

⁷⁴ In 2012 Hajib El-Hajjaji was excluded from the party to which he belonged at that time (CDH-Humanist Democratic Centre) because he took position against it when it raised arguments against the decision to wear headscarf of his colleague at the municipal council Layla Azzouzi.

⁷⁵ Humanist Democratic Centre is a Christian French-speaking political party.

that are implied in strategic and explicit lobbying aimed at addressing debated concerns regarding Muslims. This is the case of associative actors such as ENAR, or the CCIB, which take political position through recommendations to governments at different levels.

Protests or other forms of demonstrations are also means to give visibility to Muslims’ – and their allies’ – political participation in the local life. To be effective, protests and related campaigns must be supported by an “activist base to disseminate information” (RP58). Moreover, it is important to connect local issues at stake with wider ones. MRAX is among those associations that organize or participate to anti-racist demonstrations that indeed need to be arranged in concertation with local government police, to get the necessary permissions (RP9).

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 4:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 4:</i>
Islam threatens Belgian traditions	Islam is compatible with European values

The counter-narratives developed to oppose the discourses depicting Islam as threat to Belgian traditions have a double focus. On the one hand, they highlight the compatibility of Islam with European democracy and citizenship, thus targeting those values (humanistic ones in particular) that are associated with this geo-political context spoiled of its religious character.

“[within Islam] there are several trends, from the most progressive to the most conservative, but it is totally and completely compatible with democracy and European citizenship. [...] it is a European culture, it was already and it is more and more [...]. [...] [We need to] value the humanistic values of a religion that has contributed to found Europe [...]” (RP2)

Similar discourses that also rely on the historical roots of this compatibility lies behind initiatives such as the exhibition “Islam is also our history” that is held till January 2018 in Brussels, an exhibition “which gives an insight into the legacy left by the Muslim civilization on European soil after 13 centuries of presence. It is therefore not an exhibition about the Islamic religion. Nor is it limited only to the presence of Islam in Europe today, even if, of course, this is included”⁷⁶. This kind of initiatives respond to a process of “erasing systematically the contribution of Arab-Muslim culture to our cultures. [...] everything [each culture] is porous, but if we erase all signs of this porosity, of how everything is imbricated, the whole positive aspect of the mix of cultures... we only retain the ‘clash of civilizations’” (RP77).

On the other hand, the proximity between Islam and Catholicism that is seen as predominant in European countries is equally underlined, thus moving the counter-discourse within the religious sphere. “[...] It would be important to explain to Catholics that Muslims share the same roots with them!”, states Anna Colombo (RP2)⁷⁷.

Some examples collected during fieldwork show how this double focus develops mainly through informative initiatives aimed at transmitting knowledge about Islam and through intercultural events meant to promote dialogues among cultural parties that are supposedly different but convergent at

⁷⁶ <http://expo-islam.be/journey/?lang=en>, accessed 24 November 2017.

⁷⁷ During further email exchange, she added that this point is also underlined in the above mentioned exhibition that highlights – among other aspects – the presence of references to the Bible, the old and the new testament, and to the Christian faith in the Coran (29/11).

some points. This is a need emerging from the multicultural composition of Belgian (and European) society, as Colombo among others states: “we are condemned⁷⁸ to dialogue, we are too many to ignore each other” (RP2). During the ABPM 2017 dining event, the former Minister Joëlle Milquet stressed the importance for example of the month of Ramadan as “passport of openness of Muslim community”, meaning that it could be an occasion to create inter-convictional links and to promote the richness of democracy. That is why a benevolent and curious interest of non-Muslims in the values of the month of Ramadan – and in Islam more generally – may be helpful for the whole society. For the co-president of the Ecolo party Zakia Khattabi, initiatives such as that of the ABPM are steps toward bringing Belgian people together without neglecting to account for the issues of diversity that characterize them (RP32, 16/06).

More generally, events, training but also articles in the press or other media are aimed at acknowledge the diversity of Islam, since

“the problem is that Islam is often depicted as monolithic, [...] and the character of mosaic is not perceived, the diversity within Islam. This de-humanizes, it is what we call essentialism. [...] since there is discrimination, I think that we [journalists] need to compensate in a certain way, because saying ‘Muslims think this or that’ is already a discrimination, it is already to lock people in boxes” (RP24).

Gutierrez explains that journalists have the role of getting to know the diversity of the stories within Islam and this through meeting Muslim people and making their voice heard against stereotyping images concerning them. The image of European society as a mosaic is also stressed by Farida Tahar: “my ideal of society is to build this mosaic of human faces that are so different among each other [...] and that whatever is one’s belonging... [...] the world has always been like this and we have to shape it as it is” (RP28, 14/6).

Within the framework of more general events or training on diversity and intercultural dialogue, Islamophobia can be part of the specific subjects or examples addressed, as it occurs for the Regional Centre for Integration in Verviers (CRVI). Khalissa El Abbadi explains how this started⁷⁹:

“During last years we realized that we weren’t giving training on anti-discrimination, such as on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, but we were more in an intercultural approach, we were giving training on the intercultural approach. We realized that the “intercultural shocks” that they [the participants] brought to us were often shocks linked to the little knowledge about Islam.” (RP76)

These kinds of training also aim at making participants deconstruct their gaze on Muslims and also at dissociating interpretations of their behaviours as necessarily connected to their belief. Inès Tamazarti provides with an example concerning the relationship between teachers and Muslim pupils, where a “culturalist argument is easy, but they are young people first of all!” (RP77). She recalls of a teacher complaining because one of his pupils refused to colour a pig, and for her this could easily be a matter of general positioning against an instruction received from an authoritative figure more than an issue of religious positioning. Training toward a process of deconstruction also includes a broader reflection on “what strategy is put in place to deal with diversity” (RP77) within the organism to which each

⁷⁸ In French: “*on est condamnés au dialogue*”, meaning that dialogue is unavoidable.

⁷⁹ Trainers in CRVI responsible for these subjects have been trained in their turn by CEJI.

participant belongs, as well as an introduction to the history of immigration⁸⁰ in Belgium, so to “contextualize, knowing first of whom we talk, of Belgians of second, third generation [...] that are certainly Muslim but also Belgian just as much as... [other people]” (RP76).

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 5:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 5:</i>
Brussels is turning into a Muslim city	Muslims are resources

The focus of the counter-narratives put in place to react to the accusations toward Muslims as being invading Europe and here more specifically as defining the religious identity of Brussels through demographic pressure is not – contrarily to what scholars equally trying to counter this discourse may do⁸¹ – on figures. In fact, initiatives are implemented to diffuse a message about Muslims as resources for the local environment that, as a consequence, needs them for a proper socio-economic and cultural development. The means to promote this message are diverse, and they include initiatives underlining the diversity of Brussels as richness that also imply the representation of Muslims as active participants of this positive character of the city. The already mentioned exhibition “Islam is also our history” is part of the *Mixity 2017* broader campaign, a set of events to promote a city where “you can be yourself. This region does not have one identity, but several identities”⁸². Counter-narratives like this that are operating at the cultural level are effective if possible spaces of discussion and participation are fostered, and this often occurs through networking. Establishing and renewing networks with local non-Muslim stakeholders that are active at the cultural level of urban contexts – Brussels is a particularly vital scenario for this kind of events – make it possible to take part of this process of enhancement of urban diversity and to stress the role of Muslims within it.

Muslims’ local engagement also consists in improving social life, as Farida Tahar explains: “I am purely Brussels citizen, I was born in Brussels, I have always lived in Brussels, I have always studied, worked in Brussels. [...] I have a priority: to have a role in this world, to serve others and above all to fight against injustices” (RP28, 14/6). Other initiatives may build on narrating historical experiences to value Muslims’ potential and effective contribute to the local society and to make this object of discourse and exchange at the professional level. The first *Soirée Networking* organized by ABPM after the 2017 summer break and entitled *Couscous & Falafel Stories* is described as “storytelling” to put forward “cultural intelligence and the interest for cultural heritage”. The informative character of the meeting – “the discovery of entrepreneurs of Arab world [...] [that] mastered the essential qualities to be an entrepreneur: assessing and taking risks [and] [...] travelled to distant counties to buy and exchange their products in the bazars of big cities” – is seen as starting point for “enlarging your network [...], meeting people with the aim of creating a professional synergy”⁸³. Then, creating connections with existing institutions is crucial to “help [Muslim] professionals in the development of their business”,

⁸⁰ The history of Belgians’ emigration is also mentioned to put contemporary stereotypes on migrants into perspective.

⁸¹ See WS1 report.

⁸² https://visit.brussels/en/sites/mixity/m_article/about-mixity, accessed 24 November 2017.

⁸³ Fieldwork document (invitation to the event). The invited speaker of the event planned for the 10th of October 2017 is Majdoulyne Nathan, a Belgian woman with Syrian-Moroccan origins that created the association Missaly with the aim of “inspiring our youth through making role-models intervene in Brussels schools” and “the will of developing a positive diversity”.

and this occurs mainly in Brussels (RP7). These connections are legitimate also because of the rootedness of Muslims in the local environment:

“[...] we are part of the society, we constitute an important element in terms of consumption and production, we are inscribed in [Belgium’s] history, we celebrated three years ago 50 years of Moroccan and Turkish migration⁸⁴, [...] there is a narrative, there is an added value, we have to avoid that our children develop a sort of schizophrenia” (RP7).

This process of demonstrating the rootedness of Muslims in Belgium and their active citizenship as Muslims may also involve the mobilization of Muslim funds⁸⁵ to the profit of the general local collectivity. Jamal Khayar of the ABPM gives an example of it:

“Benevolence needs to find a place in Belgium. We launched a fund, the Noria fund, [...] it aims at collecting the *sadaqat*⁸⁶ of the members [...]. We made a partnership with the King Baudouin Foundation [FRB]⁸⁷ that has an expertise in managing funds, in identifying projects, we agreed a convention with them and the goal is to identify some causes that are included in Islamic philosophy or norms, [...] and once a year to identify one or more associations to which to deliver the collected sum” (RP7).

In 2016 the ABPM Noria fund was delivered to a local association taking in charge single mothers⁸⁸. This and other similar actions are means to tighten the relationships within local population notwithstanding their religious belonging and to make Muslims essential to its wellbeing: “it is a measure of inclusion and of taking responsibilities” (RP7). Muslims’ engagement in the local society surprises and triggers positive emotions in the mainstream society, in Khayar’s opinion, and this counters Islamophobia in which it “shed light on the reality” (RP7) of an active existent citizenship. “To counter Islamophobia there are frontal measures, what the CCIF or the CCIB do [...], and there are other measures, [...] that aim at [...] contributing with ones’ specificities to ensure that society improves [...] since Muslims are inscribed within Belgian society” (RP7). The migrant background of Muslims – when there is one – also contributes to enlarge the possibility of contributing to the development of local wellbeing, as Ben Addi highlights in reference to his linguistic skills deployed in his work as doctor: “I can make consultations in Rif⁸⁹, in Arabic, in French, in English, in Flemish, I try to make people understand better” (RP27). A professionalization of Muslim volunteers also goes in this direction, as it may make their contribution even more effective in reason of proved expertise.

Other narratives aimed at countering the description of Belgian cities as dangerously over-populated by Muslims focus on the city of Verviers. Mourad Touati realized a movie to gather the opinions of people living there against the mediatisation of an alleged radicalisation of its Muslim population. Recorded quotes highlight the multicultural aspect of the city and the fact that areas described as

⁸⁴ The reference is to the bilateral agreements settled by Belgium with these two countries.

⁸⁵ In the opinion of Safdi Redouane these could be mosques’ funds (RP39). As an example, he recalls an experience he lived during a stay in the US, when he got to know of a mosque that importantly contributed to local healthcare through funding the opening of a clinic open to all public.

⁸⁶ Muslims’ charity.

⁸⁷ See <https://www.kbs-frb.be/>, accessed 9 November 2017.

⁸⁸ The declarations of the director of the association, as well as of representatives of ABMP and FRB are available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AfXPT0BY0k>, accessed 9 November 2017.

⁸⁹ Berber from the northern regions of Morocco.

dangerous are definitely safe when concretely crossing them⁹⁰. A recent study by Corinne Torrekens confirms that issues concerned to terrorism and radicalisation are not pressing questions for the local population⁹¹.

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 6:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 6:</i>
A process of radicalization of Muslims is underway in Belgium	Muslims are not dangerous for the society

Studying the way in which the narrative concerning Muslims as objects of radicalization in Belgium is opposed has been a challenging and particularly interesting task as it made it emerge how this discourse is deeply incorporated not only into those who promote it, but also within Muslims themselves and other actors that fight against Islamophobia. If some denounce the exaggeration that this discourse may be object of, when it consists of “seeing behind every religious practices a sign of radicalization” (RP35, 30/6) or when it emerges as nonsense news – the reference is for example to the denunciation of processes of radicalization active at nursery school⁹² –, few get to the point of questioning the authenticity of this process. Zakia Khattabi explains that she is not among those that do it, since for her radicalization “is true”, but she equally points out that this occurs “because the global context radicalized” (RP32), meaning that each individual or collective positioning in the society strengthens in the opposition to that of other individuals and groups. Zakia Khattabi also highlights the responsibility of politics in this process when it left religious leaders to take fully in charge Muslim youth, thus disengaging with their rights and duties (RP32).

As a consequence of the overspread recognition of a process of radicalization of Muslims in Belgium, when enquiring about the counter-narratives developed to react to this discourse, most of the times we gathered instead examples of programs implemented to counter radicalization of youth. Moving the focus to counter this process as mediatized narrative of hatred – in reason of its disproportionality and of its effects on the everyday life of Muslim people without being them “radicalized” – was not easy task and the attempt was eventually abandoned during some of the interviews. The need for making the reaction of the “Muslim community” to current violent events visible as public disapproval and as civic engagement in countering them implies the incorporation of this narrative of hatred among Muslims themselves and determines the sincere will of contributing to counteract this alleged radicalization process.

The practices developed to counteract the radicalization process as well as those implemented to react to this as discriminating discourse equally inform a counter-discourse on Muslims as not dangerous for the local society – even when they are deep believers (RP35, 30/6). Jamal Khayar states that “we are

⁹⁰ The movie “Verviers : Terre d'eau au-delà du terreau” is available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1dmK7guSLk>, accessed 24 November 2017.

⁹¹ https://f.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2725/files/2017/08/verviers_belgique.pdf, accessed 24 November 2017.

⁹² See among other articles: “Signs of radicalisation amongst Flanders nursery school children”, <http://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium/8932/signs-of-radicalisation-amongst-flanders-nursery-school-children>, accessed 5 October 2017. This is an example of the fact that “today everything that has a [supposed] religious colour is radicalization...” (RP39).

not linked in any cases to deadly actions. We have a spirituality that feeds us, we try to contribute to make things move forward, [...] that anyone can find his place to be serene and contribute to society” (RP7). This discourse is based on shedding light on Islamic belonging and on Muslims’ different ways of living their faith – ways that change over one’s life time and that through being contextually situated *in* Belgium inform – ideally – the creation of an Islam *of* Belgium⁹³. This means that “[...] we prefer that [Muslim] people are trained in Belgium than in other countries and that a certain moment a gap occurs. [...] citizens must be able to enjoy their rights. Right of education is one of the most important” (RP35, 30/6).

The participation of Muslims into the de-radicalization (or the prevention of the radicalization) of Muslim youth takes different forms that are generally aimed at shaping, promoting and valuing a situated Islam. The starting assumption is that “Islam is a religion of peace, solidarity, openness and generosity” and that “a deconstruction of the radical discourse needs to occur through valuing ethical and progressive Islam and the sacred values of its spiritual message: peace, justice, equality, freedom of conviction and love” (RP29). Training is implemented to develop general critical thinking among Muslims, necessary to unpack co-optation messages that can reach young people. This is the case of the activities organized at the association Le Foyer located in the municipality of Molenbeek (Brussels), as Johan Leman, its director, explains:

“Through doing, through practice, they [Muslim and non-Muslim youth] see that things are very often different from what they think at first view that they see. [...] we make some games on this, a sort of quiz, [...] to submit imagination to the principle of reality. [...] thus for us the counter-narrative, for the population that comes to us, it’s the critical thinking” (RP6).

At the Islamic and Cultural Centre of Belgium (*Mosquée du Cinquantenaire*) the Imam and theologian Galaye N’Diaye teaches courses on “the nature of Islamic discourse” to “push studies toward a more academic framework [...] and build a more solid discourse” (RP38). A course entitled “fight against radicalization” is organized on studying the “foundations of Muslim law” (RP38). The aim is to train (young) Muslims at contextualizing the sacred texts, at studying the history of Islamic law and at deconstructing legal opinions (*fatāwā*) in order to adopt behaviours that are inspired by religion as well as connected to contemporary situated locations: “I have to choose the legal opinion that suits me the most with regard to the context where I live” (RP38). This process is described as relevant “to promote living together, to avoid Islamophobia, to avoid rejection, [...] [and to foster] the reconciliation among citizens” (RP38). It consists of a “globalising answer” (RP38) to the societal problems at stake. A situated learning process on Islam includes lessons on “laicity, Islam and laicity, Islam and democracy, Islam and living together, Islam and globalization...” (RP38).

More generally, this process of fostering an Islam of Belgium also supposes that trainers (imams and counsellors) are trained themselves and that they are

“people from here, avoiding as much as possible to make people [imams] arrive from abroad, that do not master the situation here. [...] the best thing is to consider legal opinions that emerge here, from a scholar that understands the context. [...] Islam in Belgium needs to be reformed” (RP38).

⁹³ The Platform of Flemish Imams is similarly promoting on the ground a discourse on a European Islam (RP39) that is largely present in national and international literature.

In 2015 Jean-Claude Marcourt, Vice-President of the Wallonia-Brussels Government and Minister for Higher Education, Research and Media, created a commission in charge “of making proposals to the Government to promote an Islam of Belgium in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation”⁹⁴. The report of the Commission coordinated by Andrea Rea, Françoise Tulkens, Radouane Attiya and Brigitte Maréchal recommends – among other issues – the creation of university degrees to train imams in Belgium⁹⁵ and the requirement of specific diplomas to teach Islamic religion at schools.

The Executive of Muslims in Belgium would have a role in this process of reforming and promoting a situated Islam, in which it should mediate between the State rules and recommendations – the state needs to get involved in the process, “to instil it” – and Muslims themselves⁹⁶. Galaye N’Diaye describes the overall training work organized at the Islamic and Cultural Centre of Belgium as “a work from the inside, a preventive work” (RP38) and this shows the adherence to locally (and beyond) spread discourse on radicalization, on its alleged causes and on the means to fight it, as well as a will of making this adherence clearly visible⁹⁷. In fact, training courses intensified after the terrorist attacks occurred in 2016 in Belgium (RP38) and the discourse on an Islam *of* Belgium equally strengthened.

The participation of Muslims in the de-radicalization process also consists of associating spiritual leaders with state programs designed to this aim. Counselling in prison is among the actions of which imams may be responsible for, thus targeting those people who were recognized as radicalised⁹⁸. Safdi Redouan⁹⁹ has this role in the prison of Hasselt, and he explains that his main task concerning these people is “to talk to them, to disengage them, to make sure that their extreme ideas don’t go to action. [...] Most of our discussions are based on the religion” (RP39). Our interlocutor also collects and deals with concerns regarding the bad treatment received by these people in prison, as well as with stories of discrimination that they lived before being accused of radicalization. Other forms of collaboration of Muslim people or organisms with the institutions working on de-radicalization and anti-terrorism may shape as exchanges of opinions aimed at gathering information from people that work on the ground in direct contact with individuals.

For those who question further the radicalization process ongoing in Belgium, working against it can be a pretext – or another way – to counter Islamophobia in reason of a same focus on the knowledge about Islam and on fighting socio-cultural exclusion. This means associating experts and discussions on both issues that do not mutually exclude, as one may think. Among the events organized by the

⁹⁴ Page 9 of the report, available from: [https://cdn.uclouvain.be/public/Exports%20reddot/cismoc/documents/Rapport_final_commission_Marcourt\(1\).pdf](https://cdn.uclouvain.be/public/Exports%20reddot/cismoc/documents/Rapport_final_commission_Marcourt(1).pdf), accessed 23 November 2017.

⁹⁵ Different forms of degrees or certificate are implemented at UCL, KUL, ULB, ULiège, and Saint-Louis (Brussels).

⁹⁶ For example, as mentioned in the report of the Marcourt Commission, it should be in charge of habilitating, after verification and eventual further training, those imams that obtained a degree in Islamic studies abroad.

⁹⁷ The *Mosquée du Cinquantenaire* and its Imam received repeated accusations of being sites where radicalization processes occur and were objects of further police investigation after the 2016 terrorist attacks. During the whole interview we could perceive the consequences of this factor and of its mediatization in the discourse of our interlocutor, who clearly assumed a posture of discursive legitimization of the actions implemented at the Cultural Centre to counter the accusations received more than of direct engagement with the subject of our study (the discrimination that Muslims undergo). He stated, confirming this: “when they assign you a label, it is difficult to get rid of it. [...] we do not have media, what we can do is speaking with people like you, that do research, with honest journalists that come to know the truth, and we are in the field, we work on the ground (RP38).

⁹⁸ Motivations for imprisonment range from alleged radicalized messages to “promoting terrorist propaganda” (RP39) in direct or indirect connection with war events in Syria.

⁹⁹ He is also member of the Platform of Flemish Imams.

Working group on Extremism, Populism, Nationalism and Xenophobia of the Group of the S&D in the European Parliament, one focused on countering violent extremism and it included the narration of the stories of the mother of a victim of a terrorist attack (Latifa Ibn Ziaten, France) and of the cousin of a boy who left Belgium to go fighting in Syria (RP1). The purpose is to share information that would feed a deeper comprehension of the diverse facets of the process of radicalization and to show how Muslims are victims – directly or indirectly – of such violence and they contribute to make it known and, hopefully, overcome.

At the CRVI the training on radicalisation constitutes a “Trojan horse” (RP77) to deal with issues of Islamophobia, in particular to deconstruct the discourse on an alleged radicalization of Muslims. Inès Tamazarti describes in which terms this occurs:

“You need to be strategic. [...] this is not a program [...] of detection for example. [...] [it focuses on] what can we do at our level to work, how to interact with, within my public, foreigners or people with migrant background and/or of Muslim confession. [...] when we ask people around the table that are frontline workers [...] ‘how many people have you come across till now in your career that you think that they are radicalised’, have we one case? Out of hundreds, we made eight [training courses on] radicalism, we had a hundred of participants [each], then out of 800 people there were maybe two people that raised their hands?” (RP77).

During their training on violent radicalism CRVI trainers “meta-communicate” (RP77) on their educational intentions, that are reflecting on the mediatisation of the so-called religious terrorism and of its effects. This is also among the aims of other initiatives such as the debate organized after the projection of the movie *Enquête au Paradis* (Survey in Heaven) by Merzak Allouache at a film festival held in Namur (2017)¹⁰⁰.

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 7:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 7:</i>
Islam is (and Muslims are) a problem for Western societies	Muslims are partners for solutions

As well as the discourses and practices on and against the radicalization of Muslims, the anti-terrorism policies are not necessarily questioned *per se* by our interlocutors, even if the disproportionate effects of certain security measures on Muslims are underlined¹⁰¹. In fact, the focus of the counter-narratives reacting to the discourse on Islam and Muslims as problems for Western societies is on the alleged factors determining the need of these policies on the one hand and on the mediatization of related issues on the other hand.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.fiff.be/ateliers-detail/dbat-mouvant-et-dconstruction-des-prijugs/5087>, accessed 17 November 2017.

¹⁰¹ Vincent Cornil speaks of unjustified firing of employee from their job, unmotivated searches on people and in houses, censuses in neighborhoods considered as suspected, etc. This causes a “social fracture” (RP9). More generally and at a broader level, ENAR and other organisms pointed out the fact that “European Union Directive on Counterterrorism is Seriously Flawed” as it generates discriminations “against specific ethnic and religious communities” (<http://www.enar-eu.org/European-Union-Directive-on-Counterterrorism-is-Seriously-Flawed>, accessed 8 November 2017).

We already described the participation of Muslims in the programs developed to counter or prevent radicalization in the previous section; in addition to this, here the emphasis is on the contribution to social inclusion in more general terms. This is because the discrimination resulting from exclusion from the local society is seen as a lever of violent action, as a reason to “resign from society”¹⁰² (RP35, 30/6), “to be fed up with society” (RP39). To support this perspective, Hajib El-Hajjaji recalls the discourse of the euro-coordinator against terrorism Gilles de Kerchove published in the Echo and stressing the need of fighting against Islamophobia to prevent terrorism¹⁰³. Promoting access to work is among the practices developed to counter social exclusion. More generally, for Julie Pascoet these practices should consist of

“long-term policies, anti-discrimination policies; but the subject needs to be addressed carefully. [...] the problematic of radicalization, and not necessarily only the Islamic one, is linked to the fact that there are no long-term policies, for example on social cohesion, on inclusion, on anti-discrimination” (RP23, 31/5).

Besides this, political discourse should include “signs of acknowledgement, of empathy, of comprehension, [...] [messages such as] ‘this society also needs you’ [...]” addressed to Muslim youth, this would constitute “a solution [for radicalization and terrorism] that costs zero euros” (RP35, 30/6). The stigmatization of youth is a process that impacts Muslim people in their everyday life, as it is often, for example, at the basis of discrimination based on racial assignments. Unia collects these records and when the discrimination is attested¹⁰⁴ they can decide to undertake a law process. When violence occurs and that racist motivations emerge, Unia joins the support of the victim in the penal law process to recall this factor of the crime and make it punished¹⁰⁵.

The active participation of Muslims in countering the discourse on Islam and Muslims as problems for Western societies also constitutes of diffusing a discourse on Muslims as equally victims of terrorism and also as partners for solutions, as “positive opportunities” to fight against it. That is why diversifying the configuration of teams working on it through including Muslim or generally diversity-sensitive members is highlighted as crucial. This work, in order to be effective and to reduce the negative impact of anti-radicalization and anti-terrorism policies on Muslims, needs to be accompanied by a monitoring process targeting media. Media propaganda has to be controlled through the use of diverse tools. Among them and besides the already cited guidelines for ethical journalism, we can mention the FRA diversity toolkit aimed at “illustrating the difficulties encountered when reporting on minorities” and at “presenting best practices on how to promote the principles of cultural diversity in broadcast organisations and TV programmes”¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰² This process can result in pushing Muslims leaving to their or their family’s country of origin, as it is frequently occurring today to Belgian-Turks or Belgian-Moroccans that are fed up with having to “fight continuously” in their everyday life (RP7).

¹⁰³ <http://www.lecho.be/dossier/reformefiscale/Gilles-de-Kerchove-La-menace-terroriste-reste-elevee/9874447?ckc=1&ts=1504697724>, accessed 5 October 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Caroline Rosillon explains that this process of recognition is very difficult, since it is based on the evaluation of the intentions of the parties involved and not necessarily based on written evidence and objective elements (RP8). That is why more often Unia resorts to mediation and sensitization actions – for example in the housing domain and targeting estate agencies or private owners – to prevent the occurrence of these facts (RP8).

¹⁰⁵ This happened 18 times in 2016 (RP82).

¹⁰⁶ <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2008/diversity-toolkit-factual-programmes-public-service-television>, accessed 24 November 2017.

Besides this, lobbying actions are implemented to make sure that anti-terrorist and anti-radicalization measures “are not stigmatizing, with regard to certain minorities, that they respect standards of fundamental rights”¹⁰⁷ (RP23, 31/5). The European commission is going to organize some workshops on the implementation of the European Directive on counterterrorism, also implying NGOs (RP23, 31/5), and this is part of the actions of the already mentioned EC High level group and in particular the section led by the coordinator on anti-Muslim hatred David Friggeri.

“The aim of this coordinator is to listen to the problems of NGOs on the ground, to make sure that they are transmitted to the political level of the Commission, [...] and then to see if there are actions that can be undertaken. [...] [The aim is that] EU is given voice and visibility on this subject and shows that it takes this matter [Islamophobia] seriously. [...] there is now a coordinator on this, we need to go and see him [regularly] to put forward our priorities” (RP23, 31/5).

These priorities are: recognition of Islamophobia, Muslim women discrimination in employment and education, hate crime monitoring and recording harmonization, political hate speech and counter-terrorism policies impact (RP23, 31/5). Dealing with them should work against the diffused treatment of issues concerning Muslims mostly as security matters and not as questions of human rights. In October 2017, the Commission organised its first internal training on anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination, in collaboration with CEJI and the CCIB. This kind of training is useful to undermine Islamophobia in particular at the institutional level, thus making further actions at the society level more effective.

“There is so much suspicion around the phenomenon of Islamophobia, [...] as it may be something of imaginary, that serves political Islam, etc., that you need to be well equipped, to counter-argue toward those people that say that this is not a form of racism, that is that Muslims want to have more rights [...]” (RP23, 31/5).

David Friggeri, who was nominated Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred in December 2015 (alongside a Coordinator on combating Antisemitism) explains that the main task and aim of the Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred is “to serve as a contact point for NGOs and other organisations with an interest in combating anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination and for representatives of Muslim communities to bring their concerns and ideas to the attention of the political level of the Commission” (RP14). This inevitably includes some – though not frontline – engagement with religious leaders and representatives¹⁰⁸ (RP14). “The second task entails bringing the knowledge gathered from this outreach into decision-making procedure of the European Commission” (RP14). This includes policy work in the areas of education, culture, discrimination as well as radicalization. The key issues brought to the attention of the Coordinator over the past two years – overlapping the priorities mentioned by Julie Pascoet and reported above – include 1) high rates of on-line hate speech and instances of political hate speech targeting Muslims 2) discrimination against Muslims in a variety of areas of life, including the job market 3) the double-discrimination suffered by

¹⁰⁷ The reference is in particular to ethnic profiling. This theme is also one of the contemporary focuses of the Open Society Foundation (<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/projects/ethnic-profiling-europe>, accessed 8 November 2017) and it also emerges in 2017 FRA report, available from <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/eumidis-ii-muslims-selected-findings>, accessed 23 November 2017.

¹⁰⁸ For example the *Plateforme des Musulmans de Belgique* (PMB) and the *Union des Mosquées de la Région de Bruxelles* (UMRB).

Muslim women 4) the alleged impact of certain security measures on certain Muslim individuals and communities (RP14).

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 8:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 8:</i>
Islam is an easy object of derision	Muslims are autonomous subjects

In response to the dehumanisation of Muslims through mocking narratives, a discourse on Muslims as autonomous subjects is developed. Starting from the assessment – and the sensitization of the fact – that “humour can be harassment if we do not pay attention to it [...], above all in the contemporary social climate we have to pay attention to this” (RP8), this discourse shapes as set of practices to empower Muslims and give them the opportunity of countering this narrative of hatred first through having voice in the debate and then through strong active positioning. Caroline Rosillon recalls a process of mediation set within a school to discuss about the hurting jokes received by a Muslim pupil and also involving his faith. The ongoing process includes gathering all the parties concerned “around the table” to try to explain each one’s intentions and emotions and to get awareness about them (RP8).

A strong active positioning by Muslims responds to the representations of which they are object, as Marwan Muhammad describes:

“We are not defined by that which is said about us. [...] we are not the person subject of the narratives of the other. [...] Stating one’s difference with regard to these [stereotypical] narratives, through saying ‘I...’, breaks the stereotype and re-humanize. Through saying ‘I...’, we claim our humanity, because there is no empathy for those who are dehumanized. I am a worthy human being, I have sensitivity and my relationship with spiritual things is mine” (RP85).

The EmBeM (Empowering Belgian Muslims) network was created by a group of Muslim personalities¹⁰⁹ in 2015 with the aim

“to reflect on a better living together but also to promote a generous Islam that harmoniously nourishes the whole society, in its diversity and complexity, which actively contributes to social cohesion and the building of an inclusive intercultural society, based on social justice, equality in practice and respect for everyone in its complexity”.

Another way of giving voice to Muslims in one of the social spheres where this dehumanisation mostly occurs (media) consist of developing faith based journalism or other forms of community media¹¹⁰. As examples of this process, we can mention the radio channel Arabel.fm whose programs target – and are shaped in function of – Belgian French-speaking, Arabic-speaking and Amazigh-speaking public. Other similar initiatives includes the *Bruxelloise et voilée* movement launched in 2015 by Ihsane Haouach and Mohamed Ouachen and aimed at gathering and diffusing through the Internet the

¹⁰⁹ The French version of the quote and the list of members is available from: <http://embem.be/2015/01/27/convergences-musulmanes-de-belgique-contre-la-radicalisation-et-pour-la-citoyennete-2/>, accessed 22 November 2017.

¹¹⁰ The already cited report of the Marcourt Commission highlights the fact that Muslims have the right to set religiously based media programs, but any of these exists for the moment in the French Community (p. 7).

portraits of some veiled Muslim women living in Brussels as example to fight against stereotypes. Moreover, some private initiatives are set through social media to exchange experiences, initiatives and ideas to empower Muslim women and not necessarily making this visible¹¹¹. This is based on a “private – but not exclusive – membership” that lets information circulate among active Muslim women engaged in improving their life the local society. Informal private networks are also aimed at gathering opportunities of traineeships, since veiled Muslim women face great difficulties to find one to finish their studies (RP25).

Countering the dehumanization of Muslims also means targeting cyber-hate, action which needs reporting systematically any message of hatred encountered in the net. Mustapha Chairi stresses the need of “informing about cyber-hate through the reporting tool of [browsers such as] Google or Facebook that have algorithms to detect it themselves, but you also need to report it yourself” (RP70, 8/10). Systematic monitoring (we recall the role of the *veilleurs de l’Islamophobie* of the CCIB in this process) may have consequences on media themselves in terms of loss of credibility, when they are repeatedly addressed by judgments of the already mentioned council for deontology, and in terms of losing state funding (RP70, 8/10).

A specific team deals at Unia with cyber hate, as Astrid Eichstaedt explains, and it is part of the individual support team. Among the complaints that they receive, many are from “people [...] that are not victims, that are shocked by these messages and that want to inform us” (RP82). These hatred messages often appear as comments to newspaper articles or in the pages of nationalist and communitarian groups in the social media that foster the exclusion of people with migrant background from the state (or the region) identity¹¹². They can come from “occasional” authors or from other profiles, i.e. people that act “by conviction [...], or instrumentalizing authors, that try to provoke [...]”¹¹³. Unia’s reaction in the cases where the facts are not punishable by the law and when Unia has not been contacted by the victim is to send a standardized answer reminding that the antidiscrimination law punishes incitement to hatred and that freedom of expression has limits¹¹⁴, and thus encouraging people at continuing reporting. This reaction may also be addressed to the authors of hatred messages themselves if they can be identified. Besides this, Unia is “trusted flagger” at YouTube, Facebook, Twitter: “this means that if we report something that we deem illegal, we have a faster treatment, more trust I will say. This does not mean that they remove everything that we tell them to remove [...],

¹¹¹ It consists of a Facebook private group of which we got some information during fieldwork but whose name is not available.

¹¹² An example of this process concerns the reactions of the Flemish Defence League to the death in 2016 of a Belgian Moroccan youngster during his holidays in Morocco. The League went under legal process. See <http://www.flanderstoday.eu/politics/court-hearing-follow-facebook-comments-death-teen>, accessed 23 November 2017. Another example concerns the racist messages of the group *Identitaires Ardenne*, see <https://fr.facebook.com/identitairesardennes/>, accessed 23 November 2017. Unia complained in both these cases.

¹¹³ This typology of authors is taken from a published PhD dissertation (Vrieling, 2010).

¹¹⁴ See for example <http://www.unia.be/fr/articles/le-discours-de-haine-sur-facebook-ou-sarrete-la-liberte-dexpression>, accessed 23 November 2017. “Press offences [*délits de presse*]” in Belgium fall under the competence of the Assize Court, as stated by the article 150 of the Constitution, but concretely the Assize Court is never constituted for this kind of acts (RP83). In 1999 an exception has been integrated in the Constitution to make press offences involving racist messages – not including those targeting only religious belonging – to be prosecuted before the criminal court, as Paul Borghs (Unia) explains (RP83). Negotiations can be attempted before resorting to the law process.

but the treatment is faster” (RP82)¹¹⁵. Unia asks to remove hatred contents mainly when complaints come from victims themselves or if the content of the reported messages is deemed illegal under Belgian law, and thus a record is opened and dealt with. “We realize that a whole discourse is not illegal, but it is damaging, [...] it does not help social peace, it can be toxic even if it is not illegal” (RP82). In the framework of this kind of activities, Unia commits in paying particular attention to public discourse during the 2018 elections campaigns. The Centre also collaborates with police and prosecutors (*parquets* in French) of the whole country that commit “to warn us of criminal prosecutions in which there is abject motivation, meaning that a person has been attacked in reason of his skin colour, of his religious conviction, etc.” (RP82)¹¹⁶. Unia receives a letter informing them and it can then declare itself as injured party, so to access the record and evaluate whether to intervene by a complaint and criminal indemnification proceedings. Besides this, courses are organized to give tools to the police staff to identify this kind of facts¹¹⁷.

Unia (as also CEJI, among our interlocutors) is also partner of the International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH¹¹⁸), a foundation that recently launched an European funded project involving six countries and “aimed at analysing the phenomenon of cyber hate and to elaborate some tools, a database [of complaints] and a form for reporting” (RP82). Within the analysis, attention is paid to the concurrence of the increase in hatred messages and any relevant facts occurred in relationship with the concerned theme¹¹⁹.

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 9:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 9:</i>
Islamic religion legitimates extreme forms of women oppression	Muslim women’s stories are diverse

Both this narrative of hatred and the counter—narrative developed in response to it focus on gender as crucial arena where such discourses deploy. The description of Muslim women’s stories as diverse is fundamental to react to those discourses that depict Muslim women as non-autonomous subjects oppressed by a patriarchal and misogynist cultural and religious context. Accepting the variety of the ways of living one’s own femininity is the starting point for reversing this narrative. This also means to highlight the fact that the decision to wear (any form of) headscarf is the result of “plenty of reasons and individual strategies. [...] There is a multitude of histories, a multitude of experiences, and we have to listen to this diversity” (RP32). Gutierrez recalls the choices of some women of wearing face veil in particular as autonomous and individual ones. Choices that also concern converted women that do

¹¹⁵ Among other similar agreements at the European level is the Code of conduct elaborated by EC and involving IT Companies. See http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/hate_speech_code_of_conduct_en.pdf, accessed 23 November 2017.

¹¹⁶ This collaboration is framed by the circular 13/2013 available from http://unia.be/files/Z_ARCHIEF/getfile.pdf, accessed 23 November 2017.

¹¹⁷ Also refer to: <http://unia.be/en/law-recommendations/legislation/circular-relating-to-the-investigation-and-prosecution-policy-regarding-discrimination-and-hate-crimes>, accessed 15 December 2017.

¹¹⁸ <http://www.inach.net/>, accessed 23 November 2017.

¹¹⁹ As for cyber hate against Muslims in Belgium, hatred messages increased in relation with the terrorist attacks occurred in 2015 (France) and 2016 (Belgium). The INACH report including this and other European examples is available from http://www.inach.net/fileadmin/user_upload/Manifestations_of_online_hate_speech.pdf, accessed 23 November 2017.

not have any migrant background: “give these women voice, they can explain! It changes completely [...] the stereotypes” (RP24).

The practices put in place to counter prejudices against Muslim women include training on gender issues aimed at deconstructing stereotypes, as we already saw in a previous section of this report. The protection of minorities’ rights equally goes in the direction of stating the legitimacy of being different from mainstream ways of being women. The denunciation of institutional violence against women goes together with their mobilization to reaffirm their rights, and this should ideally happen without competition among different feminist positionings. The feminist association *Vie féminine* in collaboration with CCIB (among other associations) organizes workshop with this aim, as that which was held in July 2017 in Namur¹²⁰.

Individual stories, even if not publicly narrated, give examples of actions toward the deconstruction of gendered stereotypes as they deploy in Muslim women’s everyday life. Farida Tahar explains: “I study at a music academy, [...] I follow piano courses, I sing, I am in a theatre company and I think that when you see on the stage a person wearing a headscarf, this can also deconstruct prejudices, [...] this puts questions” (RP28, 14/6). Our interlocutor also recalls other actions that have similar effects and that she or other women implemented, such as the participation to local initiatives¹²¹ where the specificities of Muslim women mix with those of the others.

Another means to deconstruct stereotypical discourse on Muslim women consist of stressing their individual skills and the appropriateness of their deployment at the professional level, thus contradicting prejudices. Farida Tahar gives an example of this process through recalling her experience as social worker:

“When I was looking for a work, they told me: ‘how would you act tomorrow if in a help care interview you have in front of you a woman, a young girl, that wants an abortion, [...] you with your headscarf, with your beliefs... [...] how would you react?’. I always had the same answer: ‘I am here to listen to the person, I am here to give her space to speak about whatever problem she encounters, I am not here to judge her, I am not here to decide in her place, I am not there to direct her... [...] I am here to help her, and if her choice is abortion, I will orient her toward those services that could accompany her’” (RP28, 14/6).

This discourse reincorporates the issue of neutrality in testifying the alignment of Muslim women to the tasks and positioning of the (public) services that they represent within their profession notwithstanding their moral opinion on the concerned issues¹²².

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 10:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 10:</i>
Mosques do not have their place in the local context ¹²³	Muslims’ claims are major rights

¹²⁰ See <http://www.viefeminine.be/spip.php?article3674>, accessed 27 November 2017. The CCIB moderated one panel and intervened as speaker (Layla Azzouzi) during the last day of the workshop.

¹²¹ She mentioned as example the *20km de Bruxelles*, a city jogging race held every year since 1980.

¹²² Farida Tahar did not declare her opinion on abortion during the interview, since this is not the point of her discourse.

¹²³ This narrative is in contrast with the recognition of Islam among the official religions of Belgium. The acts and discourses that it includes function as attempts to delegitimize Muslims’ rights as citizens.

The discriminating consideration of Muslims' citizenship as incomplete is countered through recalling the civic rights that lay behind Muslims' claims, thus prioritizing right over culture instead of the reverse. Such perspective, while starting from religiously based demands as pretexts for further reflexion, makes it possible to free these demands from their religious character and to focus on them as general (and major) claims.

The tool of the "greatest common denominator" discussed by Dounia and Lylia Bouzar (2009, 2010), inspired by the recommendations of the Council of Europe¹²⁴ and applied by Unia – among others¹²⁵ – through the work, in particular, of Nathalie Denis, goes in this precise direction. This method has been elaborated to analyse and react

"to behaviours within the framework of the world of work of workers that at a certain moment want to put forward their belief and have demands that are linked to their belief, [...] to be able to externalize their demand in their appearance, or [...] to adopt a certain number of behaviours that are linked to their belief" (RP37).

This tool is concerned with everyday relationships that do not fall into the penal law framework to be dealt with. When workers formulate a demand related to the practice of religious belief, employers (private or state) have to respond to it while at the same time considering on the one hand their general rules and aims and on the other hand the fact that other workers may not have the same needs mentioned in this specific demand. Employers may call for Unia's intervention in finding an appropriate answer to this demand through mobilising law or not depending of the opportunity to do it¹²⁶. The tool of the "greatest common denominator" is described as follows:

"The concept of the 'greatest common denominator' consists of saying: and if we saw things differently. And if we got out of the dilemma: yes for you, no for you because you do not have a fundamental right. If we got out of the idea that we have to put exceptions to the norm, and put forward the idea that we have rather to broaden the norm. We rather need to think differently. We rather need to adopt a norm that is more general and more neutral and that enables everyone to find his place within it, [...] to find a solution that benefits all" (RP37).

This tool has proved to be effective for example in rearranging work times and workplaces to be more flexible with regard to their possible use by workers. As Mustapha Chairi also suggests through giving some concrete examples, "we have to fight to have healthy and varied dishes, not to have halal [in

¹²⁴ *Institutional accommodation and the citizen: legal and political interaction in a pluralist society*, Trends in social cohesion, No. 21, Council of Europe Publishing, 2009, available online from http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/Trends/Trends-21_en.pdf, accessed 5 October 2017.

¹²⁵ The Brussels Centre for Intercultural Action (CBAI) had an active role in the formulation and adoption of this methodology in Belgium. With Unia, they gathered several civil society actors (among which associations and trade unions) as well as employers to discuss on the elaboration of an appropriate tool to manage demand linked to the practice of religious belief at the workplace. The results of this research-action are published in a book (Bouzar and Denies, 2014).

¹²⁶ The legal tool is mobilized if the decision goes toward solving the demand as individual case, and it consists mainly on putting in place a "reasonable accommodation" (RP37).

canteens at schools and at workplace]¹²⁷” or to have “multi-confessional rooms for relax in enterprises” (RP70, 8/10). This shows how the use of this tool implies “a form of neutralization of the religious question [...] [to] aim at the collective interest, at the interest of the greatest number [of people]” (RP37). Nathalie Denies also speaks about this tool as an initiative of “de-dramatization of the religious issue” and of getting out of “a process of identity assignation” and of “identification of target groups” (RP37). At the CRVI this is seen as a means to “reverse the paradigm” and “mutualize claims” (RP77). Successful experiences of this kind¹²⁸ consist of concrete solutions that also let individuals meet others in their difference and get better acknowledged about this in a posture of “mutual respect” (RP37). These experiences need to be discussed and implemented through transparent actions and involving all concerned actors, thus giving voice and space for expression to workers in order to “build their own agreement” and to find a unity as workers beyond individual positioning (RP37).

The “greatest common denominator” tool is different from but still connected to the more general category of “reasonable accommodations” already discussed in the WP1 report in which they both are measures adopted by employers to respond to claims by their employees that are – in this case – religiously based. We saw that these accommodations may imply various degrees of compromises to be assumed by Muslims. The tool of the “greatest common denominator” can potentially make this prejudice be avoided, or at least it permits to put issues arisen by Muslim workers on an equal footing with those that may concern and benefit other employees and to be dealt with on a collective basis rather than on an individual basis. Nevertheless, positive examples of reasonable accommodations that finally equally lead to potentially satisfying collective interests are reported in the ENAR Toolkit about managing diversity in the workplace addressed to “employers, NGOs and public authorities to facilitate the access of workers from ethnic minority and migrant backgrounds on the labour market”¹²⁹. The common theme of these examples consists of “valuing difference as a strategic issue”, i.e. “developing a diversity strategy including business benefits, objectives and specific measures”¹³⁰. This means for employers receiving a specific and individual demand to start a process of reflexivity on their business including rethinking neutrality to make it inclusive, testing¹³¹ their recruitment procedures, collecting equality data and good practices, getting acknowledged of the diversity of their staff and of the related practices (including religious ones), responding to identified discrimination. After that, they will be able to adopt solutions that are universally benefitted. More precisely, these solutions can be: establishing “I. General meditation spaces; II. Adopting flexible time management policies providing for break times; III. Adopting a generic holiday and leave policy allowing transferrals

¹²⁷ Mustapha Chairi underlines the fact that halal food in these contexts may be low end. He also implicitly suggests a needed association of halal food to healthy means of producing it, and to give an example of this process he mentions the “Green halal” association, a family-based farm that complies with norms on organic and local food to produce halal meat (see <https://greenhalal.be/>, accessed 27 November 2017).

¹²⁸ Among others, Nathalie Denies recalls an example concerning children’s canteens where it was settled a system of assigning colours to each category of dish and a norm of combining colours to reach a healthy meal during the day regardless the specific food chosen by children within a category. Other concertation processes also concerned the federal administrations and they lead to elaborate a general document on how to deal with diversity within them that is inspired by the “greatest common denominator” tool (fieldwork document).

¹²⁹ http://www.diversite-europe.eu/sites/default/files/equalatwork_2016_lr.pdf, p. 4, accessed 25 October 2017. This toolkit is issued from the activities implemented by ENAR within the framework of the Equal@work Platform (launched in 2009).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.24.

¹³¹ Job testing is a powerful means to detect discrimination at hiring.

to other religious holidays; IV. Demonstrating awareness and acceptance of religious festivals and holidays”¹³².

Besides this route, the prioritization of right over culture may also go through reinforcing the application of existing rights against discrimination. This process is needed to counter the fact that, “even when people are in their right, it occurs today that right is changed to stay in the cultural framework” (RP35, 30/6), as Hajib El-Hajjaji suggests referring in particular to the ongoing legal proposal aimed at forbidding ritual slaughtering without stunning in Belgium¹³³. For him, this is a form of “instrumentalization of the political and legislative apparatus that triggers the fact that it is no more right that is above culture, but culture above right: it is a will of cultural conformism, and they get to modifying right... [...]. [In this way Muslims are] defeated in their will of developing spaces of autonomy” (RP35, 30/6). One among the ways of countering this process is to set strategic partnerships, in particular with anti-racist associations and organisms that do not necessarily have a focus on Muslims but that include them among the people reached by their actions. This process makes it possible to associate the discriminations undergone by Muslims on a religious basis to other forms of racism and thus permits to join forces to promote the respect of (human) rights in more general terms. Moreover, this leads to a professionalization of anti-Muslim hatred associations. Anti-racism thus becomes a global project for society as a whole – “an inclusive society based on the principles of human rights” (RP70, 22/9), a society endowed with “a systemic, pluralist and collective dimension” (RP28, 14/6) –, as it also emerges in the words of Vincent Cornil, one among the promoters of this discourse.

“This is institutional racism, [...] even the judicial word participates to the institutional domination, political domination, cultural domination. [...] the fight is political, and the decisions at the justice level are the results of a balance of power [...]. [...] if racism is a political project, first an economic and political project that concerns Muslims but not only Muslims, it is necessary to respond to this project through another project. [...] the anti-racist project needs to be a global project, that goes beyond the mere question of Muslims, that has to be done in a convergent manner. [...] a project of society, a project of social justice that is not systematically the fact of reacting to discrimination, of being in the reaction, in counter-discourse, [...] we need to establish our arguments, our agenda, and it’s us who take action. [...] We have to make these discourses illegitimate and to make equality of rights legitimate. This is the project of society that we carry on” (RP9).

It is possible then to highlight the transformative potential of the collective works of these associations in which they do not only “take the temperature of society on these issues [of anti-Muslim hatred]”, but also “promote action that solve the problem in a global way” (RP35, 30/6). “Associations like ours [here CCIB] does a work of public interest, [...] of public utility” (RP35, 30/6). As Mahinur Ozdemir explains: “there are racisms that meet, [we need] to go toward a sort of common value, while fighting at the political level and at the media level for the recognition of Islamophobia” (RP25).

¹³² *Idem*.

¹³³ Both the Walloon and the Flemish parliaments voted a decree to prohibit it. The decrees have been rejected by the Council of state, thus need to be reviewed. Nevertheless, this proves that the process of interdicting ritual slaughtering without stunning is ongoing.

Among collaborative tools put in place by different actors working against racism are the *fiches pratiques*, technical concrete schemes developed by MRAX and CCIB to be used to recognize discrimination against Muslim women first, and to efficaciously react to it then. Nawal Meziane (MRAX) explains:

“[Since] we [Muslims] sometimes interiorize the Islamophobic discourse, [...] we want to make sure that the target of this Islamophobic discourse is informed, is aware of her rights, that she does not reproduce that schema at the dominant discourse. [...] we give them arguments to undertake the first steps” (RP10, 26/05).

Such tools enable the establishment of a standard procedure based on the recognition of individuals’ rights and on the example of concrete cases. Moreover, the support agreed by different associations to a same case law – this happens about veiling, when often the CCIB intervenes with MRAX and the League for Human Rights¹³⁴ – contributes to further possibilities of success. The aim is to “create bridges and convergences between different fights and against a victim competition” (RP10, 12/9). Zakia Khattabi also stresses the importance of making the fight against racism a “universal challenge” against the “fracture” of the “anti-racist landscape”, i.e. the fact that “each person fights against the discrimination that his own group face” (RP32).

Strategic alliances also consist of associating with other organisms that work against different forms of discrimination on religious basis. The Belgian section of CEJI and the CCIB exchange best practices and collaborate at different levels, among which that of sensitization and diversity education. Stéphanie Lecesne explains: “since CEJI fights against every form of discrimination, and that Islamophobia is a form of discrimination, CEJI fights against Islamophobia”. CEJI has implemented an interactive and participative training on Islamophobia¹³⁵ for almost ten years targeting educators (teachers, social workers, mediators, youth workers) and aimed at working on stereotypes in a secured context where people can feel free to express themselves, as Stéphanie Lecesne explains: “We all have stereotypes, preconceptions on certain groups, and what we need is to be aware of this” (RP67). In her opinion, this process is important since the approached subjects (identity issues, cultural diversity, and discrimination) “stir things that are visceral” (RP67). CEJI trainers are experts of “conflict resolution” (RP67).

Similarly, the CCIB developed a training project called “Islamophobia, Citizenship, Education” (ICE) aimed at training at least one hundred people in the fight against Islamophobia, primarily “frontline actors, those people who are in contact with a multi-cultural and multi-confessional public” (RP35, 30/6). This training tool includes thematic presentations, visual material, situational games and technical sheets aimed at deconstructing prejudices and targeting large adult public. The financial

¹³⁴ Hajib El-Hajjaji underlines the fact that the very same foundation of CCIB is focused on the convention of human rights – including freedom of religion and worship – and not on specific religious belonging (RP35, 22/9). In the recent past CCIB also collaborated with the Human Right Watch and provided it with data that has been integrated into a report on “Belgium’s Counterterror Responses to the Paris and Brussels Attacks” published in 2016 (https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/belgium1116_web_10.pdf, accessed 16 November 2017).

¹³⁵ CEJI’s choice to use this notion is linked to the fact that “victims want to use it, and who are we to say ‘no, it’s not the right term?’” (RP67).

support of state organization (in this case the Wallonia-Brussels Federation) is crucial to develop such paths.

CCIB also collaborated with Pax Christi (now BePax, a Christian-inspired association) within the framework of the Forgotten Women program by ENAR to develop a project aimed at creating spaces of multicultural and multi-convictional dialogue among women (*Par les femmes, pour les femmes, avec les femmes*)¹³⁶.

At the European level, the OSCE international initiative “Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism” includes actions of coalition building also engaging Muslims (RP23, 31/05), such as a recently held seminar aimed at training to build effective collaborations on the issue of ritual slaughter, circumcision and religious attire.

Sharing concerns about common practices can be the starting point for effective collaborations on the promotion of full citizenship against discrimination. The issue of circumcision for religious reasons has recently received media coverage in Belgium¹³⁷ after the recommendations released by the Advisory Committee on Bioethics (*Comité consultatif de bioéthique*) asking that the costs of the operation shall be no more taken in charge by the social welfare, because “the financial charge of non-medical circumcision must not lie on all citizens”¹³⁸. This is one among the possible issues where a similar positioning shared by Muslim and Jewish associations or representatives may have a more successful impact on public opinion and on policies eventually debated afterward¹³⁹. The risk of being accused of communitarianism when claiming rights may be attenuated if the demand comes from a composite group of actors. In fact, they may denounce the ongoing “phenomenon of retrieval” (*phénomène de recuperation*, RP35, 22/9) of controversial subjects that are mobilised to guide – and worsen – the public opinion on Muslims through shedding light on the effects of this process on diversified cultural categories of people. Julie Pascoet reminds that “in some countries the two communities [Jewish and Muslim] have joined [in partnership] and they do lobbying together on these issues” (RP23, 31/5).

The campaigns that follow the progressive questioning of ritual slaughtering in Belgium act in similar directions, since they are aimed at showing the impact of decisions targeting Muslims on other categories of people. We refer to the 2015 prohibition to slaughter animals without prior stunning in the temporary slaughterhouses settled for the Eid al-Adha in Flanders and Wallonia, and to the 2017 law project mentioned above. These measures, as recalled among others by the comedian Abdel en Vrai during a discussion with the president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, are means of stigmatisation of Muslims¹⁴⁰. Through boycotting the purchase and slaughter of muttons for

¹³⁶ In English : by women, for women, with women. The stress is on different women’s activism and cooperation to ensure women’s rights.

¹³⁷ See for example <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/la-circoncision-non-medicale-ne-doit-pas-etre-prise-en-charge-par-la-securite-sociale-59c129a9cd70fc627d9d222c>, accessed 24 October 2017.

¹³⁸ Advice n. 70 of 8 May 2017, https://www.health.belgium.be/sites/default/files/uploads/fields/fpshealth_theme_file/avis_70_circoncision.pdf, accessed 24 October 2017.

¹³⁹ Such shared positioning has not emerged yet concerning the example in question, but it has been evoked in a strategic meeting attended during fieldwork. Deciding whether to intervene or not, and how, in the debate over a certain issue needs to be part of a process of elaboration of reasoned and careful strategies of communication.

¹⁴⁰ <https://bx1.be/news/abdel-vrai-interpelle-jean-claude-juncker-labattage-rituel-discrimination-envers-femmes-portent-voile/>, accessed 24 October 2017.

the 2015 Eid al-Adha, Muslims made it visible the impact of political measures negatively targeting Muslims also on other actors and spheres of the society, such as, in this case, local farmers and national economy. Countering these measures also leads to shift the focus from the alleged responsibilities of Muslims in undermining shared values – here animal wellbeing – to those of other actors – such as the promoters of industrial breeding and slaughtering. This appears for example in the social media initiative “*Touche pas à mon mouton*”¹⁴¹, that demonstrates how Muslims are concerned with these values and that this is definitely not incompatible with some practices that are accused by other actors to put them at risk.

To get back to successful alliances, some others involve broader movements or groups, such as feminist ones (as we saw in the sections of this report devoted particularly to gender) but also as student committees, as it happened in the framework of CCIB’s actions against headscarf bans in high schools. This process is useful against “communitarian solutions and measures” (RP42, 12/9). The MRAX collaborates with different organisms (from trade unions to regional centres for integration¹⁴² or sub-Saharan migrants associations) depending on the environment or the specific themes of the training that they set up to “inform about the racist mechanic, [...] the institutional mechanic of the construction of race” (RP9). Among the principles lying behind successful alliances is that concerns on human rights go beyond group belongings, as Stéphanie Lecesne explains: “we are not obliged to be Muslims to fight against Islamophobia, we are not obliged to be Jewish to fight against anti-Semitism, we are not obliged to be gay to fight against homophobia” (RP67).

Denouncing discriminating processes and promoting possible solutions based on the application of rights is seen as crucial. Research and have an important role in this process as they may be mobilized in political debates (both at the federal and at the local level, the latter being pointed out as equally relevant in elaborating decisions on the wellbeing of the population). “Research and analysis” are among the main activities of Unia, that also aims at deeply considering local realities besides the state context; the opening of a contact point of Unia in Liege was also due to the need of “a little more detailed knowledge of what is really happening here” in terms of discrimination and of “formulating recommendations to the local authorities with reference to what we observe as specific issues” (RP8). Within the framework of the initiatives of Unia in Liege it is planned the elaboration of “a toolbox designated to political actors in view of the municipal elections to be held in 2018” (RP8) to gather the information collected through observing this local reality and the recommendations formulated on the basis of it. Research-action has been recently conducted on the reactions to the establishment of mosques – or other places of worship – in local environments following some protests that occurred in Retinne (Fléron, Liege province). The forthcoming results will hopefully be useful to formulate recommendations¹⁴³ that may be pertinent also if applied to other geographical contexts in order to prevent hatred discourse to emerge in the public space (RP8)¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴¹ Literally “Don’t touch my mutton”, <https://www.facebook.com/RespectDroitAbattageRituel/>, accessed 24 October 2017.

¹⁴² In Wallonia the Regional Centres for Integration are in charge of the “integration path” for newly arrived migrants in Belgium and of other issues and training concerning them.

¹⁴³ Recommendations target municipalities or other institutional actors in charge of the establishment of places of worship as well as the actors responsible for promoting and developing the projects at stakes (RP8).

¹⁴⁴ Corinne Torrekens (DiverCity, ULB) was in charge of coordinating this research, and the report has recently been published by Unia (see [https://www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Publicaties_docs/FR_-_Intro-rapport-ccl_Compil%C3%A9_DEF_\(2\).pdf](https://www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Publicaties_docs/FR_-_Intro-rapport-ccl_Compil%C3%A9_DEF_(2).pdf), accessed 27 February 2018). This subject was also object of a master thesis

The priority of the application of right over culture also need victims resort to local authorities and that this is made visible with press releases solicited by allies, as some of our interlocutors stress. Hajib El-Hajjaji denounces the fact that Islamophobic acts cannot be recorded as such at the local police and that they can only be object of discrimination reporting at the federal level (through Unia). This is something that needs to be changed, so to increase the visibility of recurrent acts of discrimination and to make possible to discuss about them at the media level. Next to these actions aimed at countering occurred discrimination, it is important to “anticipate the social debates [*débats de société*, meaning potentially controversial issues related to social cohesion] to define a position beforehand” (RP35, 23/9). This means to act, rather than react, as citizens that are concerned by the equality of rights in contemporary society.

Lastly, Hajib El-Hajjaji also evokes the possibility of intervening in countries of origin of Belgian Muslims that have a migrant background and of mobilizing diplomatic representatives in order to apprehend some contemporary dynamics and stress on them. CCIB for example intervened in Turkey in relation to the phenomenon of returning migrants and to see how Turkish politics on migrant nationals on the one hand, and European obstacles put before them toward complete citizenship on the other hand may foster this process.

5. Conclusion

The description of the counter-narratives to Muslim hatred developed in Belgium presented here testifies the fact that things are moving in the country with regard to the fight against Islamophobia. Notwithstanding the lack of a clear and univocal state positioning on the matter, and despite the difficulties that this engenders at the grassroots level – both to Muslim citizens and to activists –, several tools are discussed, elaborated and implemented by a multiplicity of local and international social actors. Their work informs the development of effective messages to counter stereotyping representations and discriminating actions targeting Muslims that are summarized in the following table¹⁴⁵.

<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 1:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 1:</i>
Islamic practices need to be secularized to be accepted in Western societies	Muslims are professional experts
<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 2:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 2:</i>
Veiling is incompatible with Western values and local rules	Feminism can be Islamic
<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 3:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 3:</i>
Islamic belonging (claimed or assigned) is a prior identity marker	Being Muslim is something normal
<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 4:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 4:</i>
Islam threatens Belgian traditions	Islam is compatible with European values
<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 5:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 5:</i>

dissertation on “*La constitution d'un fait social en un problème public. Le projet de construction d'une mosquée à Retinne*” by Roxane Dovifat, available from <https://matheo.ulg.ac.be/handle/2268.2/1689>, accessed 21 Novembre 2017.

¹⁴⁵ The criteria for the ranking have already been described in the introductory sections of this report.

Brussels is turning into a Muslim city	Muslims are resources
<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 6:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 6:</i>
A process of radicalization of Muslims is underway in Belgium	Muslims are not dangerous for the society
<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 7:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 7:</i>
Islam is (and Muslims are) a problem for Western societies	Muslims are partners for solutions
<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 8:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 8:</i>
Islam is an easy object of derision	Muslims are autonomous subjects
<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 9:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 9:</i>
Islamic religion legitimates extreme forms of women oppression	Muslim women's stories are diverse
<i>Narrative of Muslim hatred 10:</i>	<i>Counter-narrative to Muslim hatred 10:</i>
Mosques do not have their place in the local context	Muslims' claims are major rights

What has been observed as being transversal to these messages (and to the tools that are put in place to promote them) is the tension between the will of “making commonplace of Muslims”, of “normalizing” their presence through making their moral positioning a common character among others, and the need of claiming rights that are specifically disregarded when dealing with Muslim people. The tension is between indistinctness and visibility, between normality and exceptionality. The implemented actions resulting from this conceptual polarization consist of promoting initiatives of inclusion of Muslims as full citizens of the local society on the one hand and of countering initiatives against Muslims’ exclusion from the local society as incomplete citizens on the other hand. Through the analysis of the gathered examples, it was indeed possible to show how this tension, that may affect the conceptualization of the analysed practices and discourse in a coherent framework, does not prevent actions that follow one or another of these apparently opposing poles to come together toward a common aim, and to be effective in which they operate targeting different layers of the issue at stake.

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7. Appendices*List of research participants and list of acronyms*

Research participants WS2 Belgium ¹⁴⁶					
RP1.	Anita Tusar (EP)	Interview	EU	EU institution	25/04/2017
RP2.	Anna Colombo (EP)	Interview	EU	EU institution	25/04/2017
RP3.	Caterina Froio	Seminar	EU	Scholar	11/05/2017
RP4.	Gavan Titley	Seminar	EU	Scholar	11/05/2017
RP5.	Zapata Barrero	Seminar	EU	Scholar	11/05/2017
RP6.	Johan Leman (Foyer)	Interview	BE	Association / scholar	22/05/2017
RP7.	Jamal Khayar (ABPM)	Interview	BE	Muslim association	23/05/2017
RP8.	Caroline Rosillon (Unia)	Interview	BE	Institutional body	24/05/2017
RP9.	Vincent Cornil (MRAX)	Interview	BE	Association	26/05/2017
RP10.	Nawal Meziane (MRAX)	Interview	BE	Association	26/05/2017 12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP11.	Nimat Bennacer (MRAX)	Interview	BE	Association	26/05/2017 12/09/2017 13/09/2017 07/10/2017
RP12.	Sajjad Karim (EP)	Seminar	EU	EU institution	30/05/2017
RP13.	Cristina Finch (OSCE)	Seminar	EU	EU institution	30/05/2017
RP14.	David Friggeri (EC-DG Justice)	Seminar Interview	EU	EU institution	30/05/2017 07/06/2017
RP15.	Aidan White (EJN)	Seminar	EU	Journalist network	30/05/2017
RP16.	Karolina Wigura (EP)	Seminar	EU	EU institution	30/05/2017
RP17.	Blanca Tapia (FRA)	Seminar	EU	EU institution	30/05/2017
RP18.	Georgina Siklossy (ENAR)	Seminar	EU BE	International network	30/05/2017
RP19.	Alfiaz Vaiya (EP)	Seminar	EU	EU institution	30/05/2017
RP20.	Dermana Seta (OSCE)	Seminar	EU	EU institution	30/05/2017
RP21.	Yasser Louati (ex CCIF)	Seminar	EU	FR activist	30/05/2017
RP22.	Elizabeth Drury	Interview	EU	EU Trainer	30/05/2017
RP23.	Julie Pascoet (ENAR)	Interview	EU BE	International network	31/05/2017 12/09/2017 13/09/2017 07/10/2017
RP24.	Ricardo Gutierrez (EFJ)	Interview	EU BE	Journalist network	01/06/2017
RP25.	Mahinur Ozdemir	Interview	BE	Politics	02/06/2017
RP26.	Mariem Sarsari (AWSA.be)	Interview	BE	Arab women association	08/06/2017
RP27.	Taoufik Ben Addi (PS)	Interview	BE	Local politics / activist	12/06/2017

¹⁴⁶ To account for the chronological development of the fieldwork, the research participants are ordered on the basis of the date of the first meeting involving each of them.

Workstream 2: Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia – Belgium

Dr Elsa Mescoli

Working Paper 18

RP28.	Farida Tahar (PS / MRAX / CCIB)	Interview Meeting	BE	Politics / association	14/06/2017 22/09/2017 23/09/2017
RP29.	Mohamed Ameer (Morocco Amb.)	Event	BE	Politics	16/06/2017
RP30.	Zeki Guvercin (MUSIAD)	Event	TR	Association	16/06/2017
RP31.	Mustafa Alperen Özdemir (MUSIAD)	Event	BE	Association	16/06/2017
RP32.	Zakia Khattabi (Ecolo)	Event + Interview	BE	Politics	16/06/2017 13/10/2017
RP33.	Joëlle Milquet (CDH)	Event	BE	Politics	16/06/2017
RP34.	Taoufik Amzile (ABPM)	Event	BE	Muslim association	16/06/2017
RP35.	Hajib el-Hajjaji (CCIB)	Interview	BE	Anti-racist association	30/06/2017 22/09/2017 23/09/2017
RP36.	Sakina Ghani (Karamah)	Interview	BE	Muslim association	30/06/2017 07/10/2017 08/10/2017
RP37.	Nathalie Denies	Interview	BE	Institutional body	03/07/2017
RP38.	Galaye N'Diaye	Interview	BE	Muslim Centre	03/07/2017
RP39.	Redouan Safdi	Interview	BE	Federal Public Service	28/08/2017
RP40.	Yasmina Akhandaf (BOEH!)	Meeting	BE	Muslim Feminist association	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP41.	Fatma Arikoglu (Ella vzw)	Meeting	BE	Anti-racist feminist association	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP42.	Layla Azzouzi (CCIB)	Meeting	BE	Anti-racist association	12/09/2017 13/09/2017 22/09/2017 23/09/2017
RP43.	Siham Benmammar (Minderhedenforum)	Meeting	BE	Flemish network	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP44.	Zsolt Bobis (OSJI)	Meeting	EU	International NGO	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP45.	Dounia Bourabain (ULB)	Meeting	BE	Scholar	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP46.	Eva Brems (Ghent University)	Meeting	BE	Scholar	12/09/2017
RP47.	Hien Bui (OSJI)	Meeting	EU	International NGO	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP48.	Lila Charef (CCIF)	Meeting	FR	Anti-racist association	13/09/2017
RP49.	Elke Cloots (University of Hasselt)	Meeting	BE	Scholar	12/09/2017
RP50.	Simon Cox (OSJI)	Meeting	EU	International NGO	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP51.	Eefje De Kroon (Liga voor Mensenrechten)	Meeting	BE	Human rights league	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP52.	Hajar El Jahidi (European Forum of Muslim Women)	Meeting	EU	International Muslim network	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP53.	Soumia El Majdoub (Urbanpreneurs)	Meeting	BE	Consultancy	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP54.	Imane El Morabet (Unia)	Meeting	BE	Institutional body	12/09/2017 13/09/2017

Workstream 2: Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia – Belgium

Dr Elsa Mescoli

Working Paper 18

RP55.	Karisia Gichuke (OSIFE)	Meeting	EU	International NGO	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP56.	Clara Grosset (OSIFE)	Meeting	EU	International NGO	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP57.	Maryam H'madoun (OSJI)	Meeting	EU	International NGO	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP58.	Shabbir Lakha (Anti-war movement)	Meeting	UK	Anti-war movement	13/09/2017
RP59.	Rachida Lamrabet (Lawyer)	Meeting	BE	Lawyer	13/09/2017
RP60.	Kim Lecoyer (KARAMAH)	Meeting	EU	Muslim Women Lawyers association	13/09/2017 07/10/2017 08/10/2017
RP61.	Delphine Liefoghe (Unia)	Meeting	BE	Institutional body	13/09/2017
RP62.	Saïla Ouald Chaïb (Ghent University)	Meeting	BE	Human rights scholar	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP63.	Julie Ringelheim (UCL)	Meeting	BE	Scholar	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP64.	Mharian van Vliet (VREAK)	Meeting	BE	Feminist association	13/09/2017
RP65.	Kati Verstrepen (Antigone Advocaten)	Meeting	BE	Lawyer	12/09/2017
RP66.	Victoria Vandersteen (Translator)	Meeting	BE	Translator and coacher	12/09/2017 13/09/2017
RP67.	Stéphanie Leceune (CEJI)	Interview		Jewish association	14/09/2017
RP68.	Rachida Kaaïs (CSC / CCIB)	Meeting	BE	Trade Unions / anti-racist association	22/09/2017 23/09/2017
RP69.	Najatte Kaaïs (Femyso)	Meeting	EU BE	Muslim association	22/09/2017 23/09/2017
RP70.	Mustapha Chairi (CCIB)	Meeting	BE	Anti-racist association	22/09/2017 23/09/2017 07/10/2017 08/10/2017
RP71.	Benoit Mouraux (CCIB)	Meeting	BE	Anti-racist association	22/09/2017 23/09/2017
RP72.	Said Zayou (CCIB)	Meeting	BE	Anti-racist association	22/09/2017 23/09/2017 08/10/2017
RP73.	Laurie Hastir (CCIB)	Meeting	BE	Anti-racist association	22/09/2017 23/09/2017
RP74.	Fatima Aitmessaoud (CCIB)	Meeting	BE	Anti-racist association	22/09/2017 23/09/2017 07/10/2017 08/10/2017
RP75.	Malika Hamidi (EMN)	Seminar	BE	Scholar and European Muslim Network	30/09/2017
RP76.	Khalissa El Abbadi (CRVI)	Interview	BE	Regional Centre for Integration	06/10/2017
RP77.	Inès Tamazarti (CRVI)	Interview	BE	Regional Centre for Integration	06/10/2017
RP78.	Nouria Ouali (ULB)	Training	BE	Scholar	07/10/2017
RP79.	Eva Jimenez Lamas (CSC / Kahina)	Training	BE	Trade Union / Muslim feminist association	08/10/2017

RP80.	Naïma El Makrini (SSH/IACS)	Training	BE	Scholar	08/10/2017
RP81.	MHT Visio	Training	BE	Film maker	08/10/2017
RP82.	Astrid Eichstaedt (Unia)	Interview	BE	Institutional body	16/10/2017
RP83.	Paul Borghs (Unia)	Interview	BE	Institutional body	16/10/2017
RP84.	Mustapha Kastit (Imam)	Seminar	BE	Imam	05/11/2017
RP85.	Marwan Muhammad (CCIF)	Seminar	FR	Anti-racist association	05/11/2017

Meetings / Seminars / Training sessions / Events		
11/05/2017	Immigration and the rise of radical right populism	Working group on Extremism, Populism, Nationalism and Xenophobia of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament
30/05/2017	Public discussion on Muslims in the media: Challenging narratives, strengthening partnerships, engaging communities	Hosted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) in co-operation with the European External Action Service, European Commission and the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI)
30/05/2017	Closed expert roundtable on “Muslims in the media” with media professionals and community representatives	Hosted by the Canadian Mission to the EU and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)
16/06/2017	Members annual dining event	ABPM
12/09/2017 13/09/2017	STRATEGY MEETING: Challenging religious dress restrictions in Belgium	ENAR
22/09/2017 23/09/2017	Strategic Meeting	CCIB
30/09/2017	Week-end Berta Cáceres	ECOLO J
7/10/2017 8/10/2017	Muslim Women Fight Back – Masterclass	KARAMAH
5/11/2017	Islamophobie: Mode d’emploi spirituel et citoyen	Islamic Events

Acronyms	
ABPM	Association Belge des professionnels Musulmans (Belgian Association of Muslim Professionals)
AWSA.be	Arab Women's Solidarity Association-Belgium
BOEH!	Baas Over Eigen Hoofd (Boss Over One's Own Head)
CBAI	Centre Bruxellois d’Action Interculturelle (Brussels Centre for Intercultural Action)
CCIB	Collectif contre l’Islamophobie en Belgique (Collective against Islamophobia in Belgium)
CCIF	Collectif contre l’Islamophobie en France (Collective against Islamophobia in France)
CDH	Centre démocrate humaniste (Humanist Democratic Centre)
CEJI	Une Contribution Juive pour une Europe Inclusive (A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe)

CERFI	Centre d'Études Féminines en Islam (Centre for Women's Studies in Islam)
CERI	Coordination des Enseignants de Religion Islamique (Coordination of Islamic religion teachers)
CGSLB	Centrale générale des syndicats libéraux de Belgique (General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium)
CJEU (or ECJ)	Court of Justice of the European Union
CPAS	Centre Public d'action Sociale (Public Centre for Social Welfare)
CSC	Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens (Confederation of Christian Trade Unions)
CRVI	Centre Régional de Verviers pour l'Intégration (Regional Centre for Integration in Verviers)
EC	European Commission
ECOLO	Green Party
ELLA VZW	Kenniscentrum Gender en Etniciteit Vzw (Knowledge center on gender & ethnicity)
EmBeM	Empowering Belgian Muslims
EMN	European Muslim Network
ENAR	European Network Against Racism
ENF	Europe of Nations and Freedom Group
EJN	Ethical Journalism Network
EP	European Parliament
EFOMW	European Forum of Muslim Women
EWL	European Women's Lobby
FEMYSO	Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations
FRA	Fundamental Rights Agency
FRB	Fondation Roi Baudouin (King Baudouin Foundation)
HEPL	Haute Ecole de la Province de Liège (Higher Education Institution of the Province of Liège)
IEFH	Institut pour l'ÉGALITÉ des Femmes et des Hommes (Institute for the Equality of Women and Men)
IMAN	Islamophobia Monitoring and Action Network project
INACH	International Network against Cyber Hate
INDH	Institut National des Droits de l'Homme (National Institute for Human Rights)
KAHINA	Collectif Féministe (Feminist collective)
KARAMAH	Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights
KUL	Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Catholic University of Leuven)
LDH	Ligue des droits de l'homme (League for human rights)
LIGA VOOR MENSENRECHTEN	League for Human Rights
MINDERHEDENFORUM	Minorities Forum
MYRIA	Centre Fédéral Migration (Federal Migration Centre)
MRAX	Mouvement contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie (Movement against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia)
MUSIAD	Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association
MWL	Muslim World League
NPAR	National Action Plan against Racism in the EU
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSIFE	Open Society Initiative for Europe
OSJI	Open Society Justice Initiative

PCS	Plan de Cohésion Sociale (Social Cohesion Plan)
PMB	Plateforme des Musulmans de Belgique
PS	Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party)
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats
SSH/IACS	Institute for the Analysis of Change in Contemporary and Historical Societies
STIB	Société des Transports Intercommunaux de Bruxelles (Brussels Intercommunal Transport Company)
UCL	Université Catholique de Louvain (Catholic University of Leuven)
UCL	Université Catholique de Louvain (Catholic University of Louvain)
ULB	Université Libre de Bruxelles (Free University of Brussels)
ULiège	Liège Université (Liege University)
Unia	Centre Interfederal pour l'égalité des chances (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities)
UMRB	Union des mosquées de la région de Bruxelles
URBANPRENEURS	Urban entrepreneurs
VREAK	Vlaams Recreatief en Andersgeaard Kunsttheater (Flemish Recreational and Other Grounded Art Theater)

the 1990s, the incidence of dengue fever has increased in many tropical and subtropical regions, including Hong Kong [1].

There are four species of dengue virus, *D. mosquito*, *D. sgtii*, *D. sgtens* and *D. sgti*, which are transmitted by the mosquito *Aedes albopictus* [2]. The clinical manifestations of dengue fever are non-specific and include fever, headache, myalgia, arthralgia, skin rash, and haemorrhagic manifestations. The disease is self-limiting and usually resolves within 10 days. However, severe dengue fever, which is characterized by plasma leakage, may occur in 5–10% of patients and is associated with a high mortality rate [3].

There is a high degree of serological cross-reactivity between the four species of dengue virus. In Hong Kong, the four species of dengue virus have been identified in the mosquito *A. albopictus* [4]. The first dengue fever outbreak in Hong Kong was reported in 1969 [5]. The disease has since re-emerged several times, with the most recent outbreak occurring in 1999 [6].

The 1999 dengue fever outbreak in Hong Kong was caused by the *D. sgtii* serotype [7]. This serotype is the most common in the region and is also the most virulent. The outbreak was characterized by a high attack rate and a high proportion of severe cases. The disease was first reported in the New Territories in August 1999 and subsequently spread to the Kowloon Peninsula and the Hong Kong Island. The outbreak lasted for over 12 months and resulted in over 100 000 cases and over 100 deaths.

The 1999 dengue fever outbreak in Hong Kong was the first time that dengue fever had been reported in the territory since 1969. The outbreak was caused by the *D. sgtii* serotype, which is the most common in the region and is also the most virulent. The outbreak was characterized by a high attack rate and a high proportion of severe cases. The disease was first reported in the New Territories in August 1999 and subsequently spread to the Kowloon Peninsula and the Hong Kong Island. The outbreak lasted for over 12 months and resulted in over 100 000 cases and over 100 deaths.

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