

Anti-Muslim hysteria dominates French political establishment after terrorist killing of Samuel Paty

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The anti-Muslim hysteria of the French political establishment is continuing, a week after the terrorist killing of Samuel Paty, a middle-school history and geography teacher in Conflans, on October 16. The Macron administration is seeking to exploit Paty's murder to pollute the political atmosphere, legitimize the far-right, and justify far-reaching attacks on the democratic rights of Muslims and the entire working class.

On Tuesday, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin gave an interview with BFMTV and declared he had “always been shocked to walk into a supermarket and see an aisle with the cuisine from some community and some other on the other side. That’s my opinion—that this is how communalism begins.” He was clearly referring to halal and other foods that satisfy Muslim religious requirements. The obvious implication of his comments is that the mere presence of food aisles or sections of food aisles catering to Muslims leads toward the menace of terrorism. The following day, after Darmanin’s comments were widely criticized on social media as racist and anti-Muslim, he tweeted that he had “not a word to take back from what I said. Not one.”

Also on Tuesday, Darmanin closed the Pantin mosque in the Paris area, where between 1,500 and 2,000 people worship regularly. The sole justification provided for the mosque’s closure has been that its social media account had shared a video produced by the father of one of Paty’s students prior to the attack. In the video, the father had denounced Paty and accused him of discrimination against Muslims. Paty’s killer, Abdoullakh Anzonov, was apparently motivated by the video in selecting Paty as a target. According to reports, Anzonov had been searching online for

potential targets for a terror attack, and had sought unsuccessfully to obtain the addresses of three other potential victims before deciding to kill Paty. Following the attack, the mosque immediately pulled down the video and issued a public denunciation of Paty’s murder.

The student’s father has been arrested and remains in detention. It has since emerged that Anzonov had contacted him prior to the attack, using a phone number that the father had included in his social media posts. It remains unclear at this point whether the father had any knowledge of or role in the attack. It has also been reported that the father’s sister-in-law had joined Islamic State in 2014, as part of the French-backed war in Syria, during which French forces funded and armed Islamic terrorist forces to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad.

More than 50 other associations also remain threatened with dissolution. They include the Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), an advocacy organization that provides legal assistance in opposing discrimination of Muslims. The dissolution of the CCIF had been demanded for years by the far-right National Rally of Marine Le Pen. The Macron government has based its plans to dissolve the CCIF on the fact that the student’s father had appealed for people to contact the CCIF to lodge a complaint against Paty. In the same video, however, he had called on viewers to complain to the Macron government.

The father’s video was published on October 7. The directors of the CCIF have stated that they were contacted by the father three days later on October 10, six days before Paty’s killing, but immediately “advised [him] to delete the video to allow his case to

be treated peacefully.” The CCIF has filed public defamation charges against Aurore Bergé, a representative of Macron’s ruling party in the National Assembly, and right-wing commentator Zineb El Rhazoui, who respectively declared that the CCIF had participated in a “witch-hunt” and “harassment” of Paty.

The threatened dissolution of the CCIF is an open appeal to the extreme right. Since 2011, it has been listed as a consultative organization on the economic and social council of the United Nations. Yet Darmanin stated in an interview with Europe1 on Monday that he “hopes” to see it dissolved because it “receives government support, tax benefits, and denounces the Islamophobia of the government.”

What is perhaps most striking about the plans to dissolve the CCIF, however, is that it has not evoked a single word of protest from any section of the political establishment.

It is now being widely reported that Prime Minister Jean Castex intends to remove the reporter-general of the Observatory for Secularism, Nicolas Cadène. Cadène is reportedly not considered sufficiently in line with the government’s efforts to mask its anti-Muslim campaign behind the banner of the defense of “secularism.” An unnamed source close to Minister for Citizenship Marlène Schiappa had told *Le Point* on Monday that “he [Cadène] seems more preoccupied by the struggle against the stigmatization of muslims than the defense of secularism. The fact that he promotes himself and discusses with the CCIF has ended by causing frustration at the top level.”

The promotion of anti-Islamic xenophobia by the Macron administration demonstrates the fraud and hypocrisy of its claim that it is seeking to defend “free speech” and democratic rights. Under the banner of “secularism” and “free speech,” Macron is openly promoting fascistic forces and whipping up a campaign against a religious minority that encompasses approximately one tenth of the French population.

As of Thursday evening, seven people remained under investigation for the killing of Paty. They include the student’s father who posted the Facebook videos; Abdelhakim Sefrioui, an Islamist who is closely watched by French intelligence and had been involved in the publication of the videos; and three friends of Anzonov, two of whom reportedly accompanied him to

purchase the knife he used in the attack and drove him to the school at Conflans. Two students at the school, who have admitted to identifying Paty to Anzonov outside the school in exchange for money, are also under investigation, though they have denied having any idea that Paty was being targeted in a terrorist attack.

It has also emerged that Anzonov had contacted a known member of a terrorist network in Idlib, Syria, via Instagram between September 12 and 14. On August 30, his Twitter account had already been reported after he had shared photographs of another decapitation. Six days before the attack, on October 10, he had published a tweet that was immediately reported to the Interior Ministry’s platform, Pharos. No action was taken.



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