

REGARDING A CANCELED CONFERENCE: WHEN ISLAMISM PREVAILS IN BELGIUM

By **Genovefa ETIENNE** and **Claude MONIQUET**,
Directors of ESISC

On Wednesday 3 of June, **Claude Moniquet and the MP Denis Ducarme** were to take part in a conference in Verviers following an invitation by the local section of the Mouvement Réformateur (MR), a party which is a member of the Belgian government coalition.

The topic of the conference was **radicalism and jihadism**. If the MR of Verviers had decided to organize, in a private place, this event, it was not by hazard: **on January 15 in Verviers, an operational cell of the Islamic State, which was apparently preparing attacks against the police, had been destroyed and two terrorists, recently returned from Syria, had been killed.**

We learned with surprise, in the mid-afternoon that **local authorities, on the advice of the police chief and the Office Central Analyse de la Menace (OCAM), had decided to cancel the conference for "security reasons"**. Some threats have apparently been issued against the police and the mayor who felt they had not the capacity to ensure the safety of their policemen and their citizens.

We conclude that the pressure from a few dozens of extremists - Verviers is known to be a breeding ground for Islamist extremists – has been stronger than the public powers. **Verviers is then the only place in Belgium (and maybe in Europe) where it is not possible to talk freely about Jihad and Islamism.**

These are the consequences of decades of laxity and carelessness: **some peaceful citizens, who just want to discuss and understand the world around them, are denied this right in order to spare the feelings of a few dozen thugs who dishonor the religion which they claim to defend.**

If we understand the need to protect police officers and civilians, we cannot accept a decision that sweeps away our most basic constitutional rights. The Article 19 of the Belgian Constitution states: **"freedom to demonstrate one's opinions on all matters is guaranteed"** and the Article 26 of the same law states that **"Belgians have the right to gather peaceably and without arms, in accordance with**

the laws that can regulate the exercise of this right, without submitting it to prior authorisation..."

The decision taken in Verviers violates these two rights; it confirms the kidnapping of our freedoms and of our society by a handful of extremists. It is unacceptable.

We will not paraphrase Churchill about Munich (saying for example that the authorities in this case had the choice between courage and cowardice, honor and dishonor; that to avoid possible unrest and violence, they have chosen the path of cowardice and dishonor but they will still face unrest and violence ...), but tonight **we are sad and ashamed of this country, because the signal which has been sent is one of a desperate weakness.**

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